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A NEW YEAR'S MASQUE, AND OTHER POEMS. Limited Edition, printed from type. 16mo, gilt top, $1.50.

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THE ROUND YEAR

BY

EDITH M. THOMAS

Cleave to thine acre; the round year
Will fetch all fruits and virtues here

EMERSON.

BOSTON AND NEW YORK
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TO THE MEMORY OF

HELEN HUNT JACKSON.

Great heart of many loves! while earth was thine,
Thou didst love Nature and her every mood:
Beneath thine eye the frail flower of the wood
Uplifted not in vain its fleeting sign,
And on thy hearth the mast-tree's blaze benign,
With all its sylvan lore, was understood!
Seems homely Nature's mother-face less good,
Spirit down-gazing from the Fields Divine?
Oh, let me bring these gathered leaves of mine,
Praising the common earth, the rural year,
And consecrate them to thy memory dear, —
Thought's pilgrim to thy mortal body's shrine,
Beneath soft sheddings of the mountain pine
And trailing mountain heath untouched with sere!

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NATURE AND THE NATIVE.

Wise Autochthon, bid thy roots
Grapple firmer yet the soil,
That assures thee bread and oil.
Wandering life thy scheme ill suits,
Strengthen every connate tie.
Thou art held within a coil:
Free thou art, if thou comply;
Bond, the moment thou wouldst fly.

NATURE becomes genial and communicative only when assurance is given that you have come to stay, to "locate," and make a focus (or fireside) on your own account; but should it appear that you are only touching, on your way to some more distant point, she gives the genii of the place explicit orders not to induct you into any of their choicer mysteries: the mere spy is tolerated, but not encouraged. You come, eager and aggressive, on your specialist's errand, whatever it may be, — botany, ornithology, or other; you may take hence, perforce, a large number and variety of specimens, press the flower, embalm the bird; but a "dry garden" and a case of still-life are poor showings for the

true natural history of flower or bird. This can be obtained only by remaining, and becoming naturalized in that Queen's Dominion, of which your specimens were loyal subjects.

Distrustful Nature! jealous aboriginals! It is plain no confidential relations can be established, as a basis for profitable intercourse, until it is thoroughly understood by the court and the commonalty that you intend remaining, and will take a citizen's interest in the smallest municipal affairs. A native of the level country had long regretted being shut out from the communion of the mountains. At length, it came in this native's way to perform the prophet's miracle, and he went to the mountains; but the mountains received him not: vows and oblations he failed not to pay at their altars, but to no avail. He came and went, frequenting their solemn deliberations. Something he heard of what was uttered by their granite lips, but it bore little significance to his mind, for he had never acquired the vernacular, and could find no one to act as interpreter in his behalf. Besides, it soon seemed to him he would like these grave eminences to stand from between him and his philoso-

pher's sunlight, for unquestionably they delayed the morning, and hurried on the evening shade. Taking train for home, he watched with half-conscious satisfaction the mountains lapsing to hills, the hills to gentle undulations, — like waves of the sea quieting after a storm; and when at sundown the wide, open country, with its liberal harvest fields and its frequent jutting peninsulas of dark woodland, came in sight, sweet content and tranquil pleasure entered his heart, through his eyes. The scene appealed; he could respond; he could not mistake its purport, having been thus addressed since childhood.

Removed from home, it is curious what a congeries of foregone delights our memory finds to bemoan; the loss of the least thing afflicts us. Unless we can hear that distant Homeric alarum, the cawing of crows beyond the still, autumnal woods; unless our step threshes out the wild incense of pennyroyal as we go through the fields; unless we can see the scraggy trident of the old three-cleft apple-tree, thrust up sharply against the evening pallor, — we feel a sense of strangeness and deprivation altogether disproportioned to the significance of the poor

things we prize. The Land of the Stranger — it is well situated under heaven, pleasantly diversified, prompt and generous with the husbandman; yet ask us not to sit in judgment upon its excellences, for we must confess to prejudice and a preoccupation of love. The face of the Stranger's Land is fair, but, to us, it lacks spiritual beauty; good soil it is, but our own stubborn glebe will produce more for us. We owe to travel this, at least, that it sends us back to our own with increased esteem and affection for the homely and familiar surrounding.

Remove a race, or an individual of a race, from its habitat, and we shall see with what fond ingenuity it strives to make the foster-land take on the semblance of the mother-country's face. The new country presents a horticultural hodge-podge, — a vast, unfenced field, gardened according to the home-reflecting custom of how many and diverse nationalities. Their works do always follow them; their grains, their trees, their flowers, and (more's the pity!) their weeds, until only the botanical adept can safely say what is indigenous and what introduced. Wherever he goes, though only from section to section, the settler brings some traditional

notion or other, which he recommends virgin Nature to adopt. Early in the pioneer days of the Western Reserve, a certain township blossomed out with mayweed, in whose hardy and prolific stock the tender slip of transplanted civilization encountered a stubborn combatant. Without doubt, *maruta cotula*, smuggling itself in with other botanical supernumeraries, would have followed the emigrants, at no distant day; but its immediate generation, in this particular neighborhood, was due to the broadcast sowings of one of the settlers, who, holding by the remedial virtues of mayweed, and fearing lest it might not abound in the new country, had taken care to bring from his eastern home a goodly supply of seed! Henceforth, among the neighbors, the weed was sarcastically mentioned as the "Deacon's medicinal herb;" but I venture to believe even they were often gratefully reminded of the look and aroma of the home roads.

The binding strength of the claim which Nature — the limited Nature surrounding the spot of our nativity — fixes upon us, was never better illustrated than in the pathetic story told of the Esquimau, who, mortally ill, was being conveyed to his native land.

As the voyage progressed, he was constantly inquiring of those on the lookout: "Do you see ice? Do you see ice?" Surely, if he did not live to reach the frozen coast of his mortal desire, his spirit could never have rested until it found an Elysian field of trackless snow and an unmelting palace built from quarryings of the glacier. It is possible we do not yet understand the true pathology of home-sickness. Who knows whether soul or body pines more for the familiar envelopment? Have wood, field, rock, and stream vested in us something of theirs? or have we so parted our spirit among them, that separation touches us so sorely? It is as though the lowly elemental life, inalienably connected with us on our Mother-Earth's side, cried out with one accord: "O dear Native, stay with us in the place where you were born! We faithfully serve you while you speak and act among your mobile kind; and we, when you cease from speech and action altogether, will receive and disperse your worn-out substance more gently than it could ever happen to you elsewhere." This lowly elemental life insists upon its kinship with us. Wherever man is born, he finds himself, in large de-

gree, "bounded by the nature of the place." He may be reckoned outlandish or inlandish, according to the topography of his country. If he be of the highlands, he develops another set of muscles than that habitually exercised by the lowlander. As surely as Nature grows dwarfs or giants where she pleases, coloring them white, black, red, or yellow, curling their hair or brushing it straight and lank, she has a coöperative hand upon the temperamental qualities of the race. The countenance she turns toward us is, in a measure, reflected in our physiognomy, pictured small in the eye, so that frequently it may be inferred whether hill, prairie, or the watery plain fills our natural perspective. We read that the blood of certain marine crustaceans has the same pungent bitterness as the sea itself; is there not, perhaps, a salty tang in the arterial circulation of a people dwelling on the seacoast? A something insular in the disposition of an island people (we are not, in particular, thinking of the "snug little island")? Do we not expect an Alpine race will be good climbers, natural aspirers? that a forest race will be shy, mysterious, druidic? We must not be too hard upon Bœo-

tians if we find them sluggish and inapt, but remember how heavy and sleep-inducing is the atmosphere that overlies their province. We must pardon in the dweller of the tropics a tropical luxuriousness in habit and feeling, and condone austerity in the pensioner of a hard-bound soil; mindful that where plant growths are rapid and quickly matured humanity is physically precocious, and that where Nature takes a century to rear an oak, making it strong as a mediæval castle, man's upbuilding progresses as slowly and surely.

A SPRING OPENING.

WHEN does the spring begin? In November, if we credit the witch-hazel; for no sooner has this vernal-hearted creature stripped off her last summer's raiment than she decks herself out in yellow gimps and fringes, seeming to say, through the ominous rustle of falling leaves, "Neighbors, you are all mistaken in giving up and going to sleep. See how thrifty and courageous I am!"

Indeed, throughout the winter, nature's active and crescent principle seems never held wholly in abeyance. From time to time, some precocious member of a dormant family, plant or animal, may be observed awake and stirring, as one who, having much on hand to accomplish, makes an early start by candle-light. The ground-hog is not the only cave-dwelling worthy gifted with meteorological second-sight. The sleeping earth divines.

I have always wondered at the remarkable presumption of the almanac-makers in fur-

nishing us with a time-table showing the arrivals and departures of the seasons. They quarter the year by means of equinoxes and solstices, and we good-humoredly accept the arbitrary divisions. The only difficulty is the great number and frequency of Nature's movable festivals, which no statistician can tabulate, the order being completely changed from year to year. It takes the united skill and experience of Old Probabilities, the naturalist, and the poet, to run the line of survey exact between winter and spring. The frontier is constantly shifting. A few days of sunshine push it forward many leagues in favor of spring; but the north wind, making a brisk assault from behind its icy intrenchments, repels the invasion, and reconquers the disputed territory for winter.

It is still February. You may treat it as *Dies Februatus*, time of purification and sacrifice; or, as the merry month of Sprout Kele, following the faintly hopeful suggestion of the old Saxon calendar. The long snow has retreated under-ground, or is fast being carried off by numerous plethoric streams, yellow and seething as torrents of lava lately spilled from some volcanic crater. The earth everywhere looks shriveled and

mummy-like, giving us the impression that the cerements have been folded back prematurely, or that the miracle of resurrection lags far behind the hour appointed. Last year's crisp leaves take spasmodic flight, like bits of paper blown about in the electric current. They sail so high, one might fancy they drifted into the folds and creases of the ragged, low-lying clouds that characterize February's sky. In yonder corn-fields the pumpkin vines lie scattered about in withered festoons; suggesting that the Lernean snake may have been captured there, dispatched, and left to dry away in the sunshine. Some trees in the orchard still bear a remnant of their last year's fruitage: there are your cold, frost-baked apples; there your cider, well mulled and warranted not to intoxicate. Here are black walnuts, fantastically mined out by the squirrels, reminding one of the ingenious knick-knacks carved of bone or other material by prisoners or idlers. These shells would now do to string for a rustic rosary, on which to bead our prayers to the sylvan deity. Here is a goldfinch's nest, plucked from its branch and thrown away by the wind as a thing capable of no more service. It interests us as some abandoned cabin on

the edge of the wilderness might. Any tenement that has once sheltered a family, bird's brood or man's brood, has a certain pathetic suggestiveness; we hate to see the old homestead given over to destruction. This "cottage in a tree," on examination, proves to have been built almost entirely of thistle down, strengthened by a few long, tough grasses, answering for king-posts and tie-beams.

As soon as the snow is off, I find in the orchard evidence of extensive agricultural operations that have been carried on all winter under cover of the deep snow-drifts. I know the husbandman who scooped out these primitive looking furrows. He is, in himself, a most curious piece of combination machinery, his nose being a natural plowshare, and his fore-arm a natural spade. He may be characterized as the original Autochthon, being earth of the earth, — a clod, with a little instinct superadded. He is known by hearsay as the mole. Rare are the glimpses one may have of this shy groundling! The field of his operations is scarcely less ambitious than that which Kubla Khan inclosed for the site of his pleasure-house: —

"Twice five miles of fertile ground
With walls and towers were girdled round."

If you lay open the soil, thinking to follow his trail, you will be surprised at the great number of turns he has made, — to the right, to the left, back again upon his traces, — until you find one deep bore which descends, apparently, to the nadir. If your excavating tools are good enough, and your patience is also good, you may come upon him comfortably dozing in the penetralia of the earth.

His neighbor, the field-mouse, is the proprietor of that low grass thatch, looking precisely like the geographical picture of a Hottentot house. Thrust your fingers through the front door and gently lift off the roof, and you will see as cosy a domicile as ever sheltered a feathered biped. It would seem that this obscure citizen of the earth had sometime been to school to the wren or sparrow, so nest-like are the structure and appointments of his sleeping-chamber. I never found much in his larder beside a few apple seeds, — small indication, indeed, of riotous living. A good many well-riddled apples lying in the path of his explorations suggested that he had been living on the vegetarian plan through the winter.

The season advances. The day is lengthened perceptibly. Yesterday, this meadow

was Winter's camping-ground. To-day, a few barracks, shreds of canvas, and broken bits of ammunition (frozen drifts in fence corners and hollows) remain to speak of his occupancy. The sun and the south wind have been this way together, and after them comes the rain, obliterating these last vestiges of the flying winter. A few days more of gentle weather, and we see little irregular paths of green winding everywhere about the pastures; these paths mark the route taken by Spring on her first stolen, invisible round. After a while there will be no spot of ground her quickening feet have not touched.

Strip off the sodden leaves, which are the patchwork quilt Nature spreads over her babes in the wood. A legion seedlings stretch their whitish-green arms above the mould. Vegetable crustaceans they are, extending their tentacles in search of food. Great mother! if these bantlings of the oak, the beech, and the maple squirm and twist, and find their cradles too short and too narrow, what will become of them by and by, when they require more room for exercise and more abundant nutrition? Wherewithal will you feed and clothe them? Think of the vast prairies, where you have n't the

shadow of a tree! Consider if you cannot transplant some of this surplus population in its infancy.

Last autumn I observed, with speculative interest, the great amount of spurious mast which the oak-tree discharged along with its natural fruitage. It seemed not unlikely that, if a count could be made, the numbers of this spurious mast would be found to exceed those of the acorns. Inside of one of these mock nuts, round in shape and of the size of a pea, a kernel not vegetable is found: this is the sleeping-chamber of a lazy white grub, — suggestive type of the earthling, buried in fat content in its own little terrestrial ball. A strange servitude is this of the oak to the cynips, or gall-fly, in thus contributing of his substance to the housing and nourishment of his enemy's offspring. The mischievous sylph selects sometimes the vein of a leaf, sometimes a stem, which she stings, depositing a minute egg in the wounded tissues. As soon, at least, as the egg hatches, the gall begins to form about the larva, simulating a fruity thriftiness, remaining green through the summer, but assuming at length the russet of autumn. The innocent acorn Nature puts to bed as early as possible, that it may

make a healthy, wealthy, and wise beginning on a spring morning; but the cradle that holds the gall-fly's child she carelessly rocks above ground all winter. I should suppose that more than one hunger-bitten forager, four-footed or feathered, would resort to a larder so convenient and so well stocked with plump tidbits.

When I visit my old favorite oak in spring, I notice that the nut-galls are emulating the acorns in emancipating their imprisoned germs of life. Most of the former are already empty, their brown-papery tissues riddled like fire-crackers whose use is past. In some few the grub is still enjoying a sluggard's slumber; others show a later stage of metamorphosis, — the small bronze and blue-green fly, with its wings folded about it, like a queen in the tomb of the Pharaohs. Sometimes, when I open the gall, the inmate is already mobile, and flies away as soon as light and air reach it. For the moment, the incident has a symbolical significance: I fancy myself an enchanter, — the reviver of a smouldering spark of vital fire. Perhaps it was Psyche herself whom I wafted to the enjoyment of ethereal pleasures.

The old trees have recorded another year,

letting out their tough bark girdles to accommodate the new layer of muscle and adipose. The sap now takes to its capillary ladders, climbing slowly, slowly; encouraged if the sun shine, faltering and retreating with every relapse of keen weather. What an Odyssey it has to accomplish from the roots of the tree to the last bud on the outermost twig!

South America possesses the Milk Tree, India the Bread Tree, but it is reserved, as a sort of climatic paradox, for our Temperate North to furnish the very top of luxury in the shape of the Sugar Tree. A man who could persuade these three staple producers to grow on his plantation could thenceforth live independent of the milkman, the baker, and the grocer. It would be easy work to gather the yield of the two tropical trees, but the sweet of the maple would still have to be gained by the sweat of the brow. Beside its delicious sweetness, there is a rich, almost oleaginous, quality in maple syrup which suggests what the maple nut would have been if Nature had said, "Consider the ways of the hickory, beech, and chestnut, how thrifty and hospitable! Their bounty keeps my birds and my four-footed groundlings all winter through. Do thou ripen a kernel of

thine own, more toothsome than theirs." What Nature did say was, briefly and practically, "Invest in sugar." More cold, more sweet, seems to be the law governing the saccharine supply, as though there were warmth and food in the sugar principle, and as though it were excited by keen weather to greater activity in order to meet the needs of the tree. The sap of all wood in early spring is perceptibly sweet. If the discharge of sap from other trees were as free as from the maple, it might be profitable to tap them also, as the butternut, for example. It is plain that Nature drops a little sugar in the milk on which she rears her nursery. All young ones love sweets, even to the baby leaves on the old trees.

Who will read us the idyl of The Sugar Bush? Let us hear no more of the honey of Hybla, or the cates that Hebe and Ganymede serve up to the Olympians! Shakespeare may have meant the spring harvest of the maple when he said, —

> "Why then comes in the sweet o' the year,
> And the red blood reigns in the winter's pale!"

This is the only tree we have that "sweats honey." Into its veins, as into the veins of heroes, the gods have infused ambrosia. Had

the maple been indigenous in Greece, there would have been a special myth regarding it, a special custodian appointed to watch over the sacred grove. Perhaps Pan would have figured as the first sap-gatherer, the first refiner of sugar. The legend would then have run thus: Pan taught the Arcadians to pierce the forest maple, opening its veins with sharp steel, and in the mouth of the wound inserting the reed which he was wont to blow upon; through this the immortal ichor of the tree distilled, drop by drop, into a pitcher of wreathen gold and silver, lent by the wondering Bacchantes, who stood near with Silenus, nearly astonished into soberness. Pan then built a fire of sere wood, and having poured the immortal ichor into a vessel of iron steeped it for many hours, obtaining a honey-sweet, heart-easing cordial, of which many gods and mortals partook with great delight.

There is telegraphy in the air nowadays; hourly, momentary messages flying between the busy rural genii. These messages may be "taken off" at any station along the route where there is a practiced operator, an intelligent and sympathetic ear. One hears of the mysterious trysts kept between botany

and zoölogy, — of plants waking up by alarm-clocks, and of birds traveling by midnight express, on receipt of expected despatches from head-quarters. I occasionally hear Flora and Fauna exchanging the compliments of the season, and such pleasant gossip as naturally results from their near-neighborly relations : —

Fauna. I have just sent a minnow up the creek.

Flora. I 've been blossoming out a pussy willow there by the bank.

[And after an interval :]

Fauna. I venture a bluebird.

Flora. Good. I 'll risk a blue violet in the south meadow.

[And still later :]

Fauna. If you listen, this evening, you will hear a frog in the marsh.

Flora. To-morrow I shall send you a basket of cowslips.

Fauna. Thanks. I am just starting out a hive of bees. Would you like them to scatter pollen ?

There is no cessation of this correspondence throughout the season. The mutual consent and joint plannings of the two friendly goddesses are everywhere observa-

ble. It is to be noticed that for every bird that becomes whist and moping, after the height of summer is passed, some plant will be found putting on sackcloth and ashes, and absenting itself from Flora's court for the rest of the year.

Severe and protracted as the winter may have been, the three chief pioneer birds, robin, song-sparrow, and bluebird, do not vary a week in their arrivals, spring after spring. How curiously elate the first robin is! *Qui vive? Qui vive?* he whistles from the maple tops, on the morning following his return. His song is the same as the thrush sang to the poet Keats, on a spring morning: —

> "Oh, fret not after knowledge! I have none,
> And yet my song comes native with the warmth.
> Oh, fret not after knowledge! I have none,
> And yet the *evening listens.*"

He seems as one prepared to take all weather risks. His well-feathered plumpness readily suggests that he has made it a point to build up a good physique against the initial hardships of a spring campaign. Does he return to his quarters of last year, — his substantial *adobe* house in the fork of the apple-tree? A friend of mine reports

finding a robin's nest with basement, ground-floor, and chamber, three successive stories of good solid mason-work, built in as many successive springs, the last story only being tenanted the current season. Whether this stronghold was in the possession of the original line of builders could not be determined.

Ah, the bluebird's warble! If any bird is specially commissioned by Heaven to spread the spring evangel, it is he. Yet, like the Ariel spirit that he is, there is, at first, a touch of ventriloquism in his voice. To fix his whereabouts, we look not only "before and after," but overhead, and in the bushes, and along the grass, and see him not — at first. If he bears the sky on his back, as Thoreau thought, it must be the sky of Italy; the heavens are never so blue over this region of the earth. There is red enough on his breast to have distinguished him as a red-breast, had it not been for the more pronounced azure of his wings.

I hear the song-sparrow practicing his first matins for the year. No wonder his song has been compared to the tinkling of bells! A more vibrating, resonant quality there is not in the whole choir of native-

bird voices. His ditty consists of three short introductory notes (embodying the theme or motive, perhaps); these three notes translating themselves, to my ear, in the syllables "sweet, sweet, sweet," with a drawing in of the breath each time, followed by a bewildering succession of delicious tintinnabulations. From the song-sparrow's manner of perching and addressing himself as to the auditorium, I cannot help thinking that he has been in training for the lyric stage. Not long since, I was present at a musical duel, — not between the poet and nightingale, but between two song-sparrows, distinguished professionals. One I could both see and hear to good advantage. When he had sung through his part, he stopped, and, with head cunningly askance, listened to his rival's performance; paying the most jealous attention, and, meanwhile, revolving some new felicity of his own. Each time he slightly varied the cadence, winding up with a piquant little crotchet, as who should say, "Can you outdo that, I wonder?" The duel grew more animated with every bout, until the performers, forgetting the etiquette of competition, sung the "rests," ineffectually trying to put each other out. A third

voice could then be distinguished, — probably that of the moderator, or judge, who held the wager.

That long, clear, cool note, like the arc described by a bright new sickle, — that 's the meadow-lark ! I know well the springy pasture where he hunts his breakfast, the wind-crisped pools where he sometimes dips his bill. His coming is not long delayed after the middle of March. The blackbird is his contemporary. I saw a whole flock of daring blackbirds careering above the gusty woods in the March gale. They seemed to be exercising their speed and agility in one of the heroic games of the air. When they reached a goal, or station, in the top of some high tree, they disposed themselves about the branches like so many weather-vanes, all facing in the same direction, and all indicating the south-southwest. This was practically " trimming to the wind."

This April has some lovely exotic days, borrowed from the Indian summer, and applied on account of some April weather in last October. The fall and spring have many meteorological phases in common. We have now the same luminous white

skies, the same drowsy luxury in the atmosphere with heat waves over the distant fields, that were characteristic of the Indian summer. The tawny and crimson inflorescence of maples and other early-budding trees contributes to the autumnal glamour of the picture. Except for the greenness of the grass and a certain *verve* and freshness within our hearts, we might imagine we were drifting past the source of the year, to find the summer by way of October and September. But the spring is here. There is nothing dead or inorganic to be seen. The maple brush left by the choppers last winter is bourgeoning out, in cheerful unconsciousness that its veins are cut off from the arterial supply. The log rotting in the woods, if it puts forth no new life in kind, at least supports a lusty growth of ferns and mosses. Who knows how much stubborn rock went to mill, last winter, to be ground up into good fertile soil? Who knows but the very stones are softening, continually growing more yielding to the feet of such poor humble plants as are disposed to take up their abode with them? I should not be surprised to hear that Nature herself was the Pyrrha who, surviving the deluge,

and casting stones behind her to repeople the earth, saw them assume organic life and form. The earth breathes freely once more, respiring vapor and gnats from the fresh-turned soil.

Now if I owned Pegasus and a few acres of good upland, not too cold and dry, I would go plowing; and as I shaped the course and depth of the furrow, grasping the stilts with firm hands, I would sing a pæan for the plow. Every great plowman, from the founder of Rome to the finder of the mountain daisy crushed by the share, should be celebrated in my song; and I would teach that there is still something sacred about the furrow, as there was when Romulus marked out the walls of his city and lifted the share over the places designed for gateways.

The heroic-romantic interest which some attach to an old, dismantled, peace-enduring cannon I find in the plow during its winter vacation. All its features, if I may so speak, express the idea of enforced idleness: the out-thrust handles assert its impatience to be taken afield; the share and the mould-board, though they have gathered rust, signify their readiness and avidity.

I would like to see again certain plowed fields of my childhood's haunting, — fields next the woods, slowly, by repeated grubbing and burning, won over from wild nature. Here and there are beds of ashes; also, charred stumps, out of whose hollow centres dart occasional slender flames, pale in the sunshine: one might fancy that these are some species of harmless small snake native in such places. The plow works its way among the stumps, and leaves untouched many a defiant oasis of weeds and wild grass. Would it not be well to remodel the verse which represents the soil as "patient of the bending plow"? Here, the bending plow, or rather the plowman, must be patient of the soil. But the scent of the fresh-turned earth, of baked clods and charred wood, with now and again whiffs of smoke brought along by the moist wind, is, memory declares, incense most grateful to the rural deities.

To some extent, new-uncovered land satisfies my desire to visit new-discovered land. The plowed field which I visit to-day was a meadow last year. Such turning and reshaping of the old garment of the soil should give this spot of earth span-new attractiveness in my eyes. As I listen to the snapping

of grass roots (stout stitches in the old garment!), as small stones tinkle against the plowshare, and as I see the turf quickly and cleanly turned by the invisible iron or steel toothed rodent, I am ready to applaud: "Well said, old mole! Canst work i' the earth so fast? A worthy pioneer!"

The furrow-slice, — does it not look appetizing to a hungry eye? And the field, when it is plowed, — does it not somehow suggest a giant brown-loaf, or gingerbread, methodically cut in impartial pieces? How cordially the earth invites the husbandman! It is either, "Ho! here is your racy soil for corn;" or, "Here is your choice land for wheat;" else, "Why seek you further for a vegetable garden plot?"

As this dry-land keel pursues its course, lifting the brown waves around it and leaving a permanent wake, scores of adventurers flock hither. What bird of the air spread the news among his kind that this field was to be plowed to-day? Before one furrow's length is completed the farmer has a following of blackbirds and robins ready to share the toils and profits of tillage. Say what you will, this is coöperation: the birds have man to thank for to-day's entertainment,

and man has the birds to thank for their services in behalf of future harvests. Down these feathered throats, almost too much engrossed with the pleasures of the palate to exchange the civilities of the day, goes the angleworm, with all its knots and kinks; *item*, cutworm, slug, beetle, and mischievous larvæ unnumbered. Some one with a turn for numerical statistics has by calculation ascertained that "a redbreast requires daily an amount of food equal to an earthworm fourteen feet long." Consider, O man of toil, how greatly thy own welfare depends upon this surprising appetite: if the redbreast should be out of health but for a single season, what ill fortune might befall thee and thine!

The ground that was broken this morning is, long before sunset, disputed over by wandering clans of gnats. These fretful children of the earth have not yet learned that their air privilege extends beyond the limits of the furrow whence they come. Flies lazily sail hither and thither, their wings glimmering in the sunshine; fireflies of the daytime, I see, carrying sparks of argent light and leading fancy along the sylph trail. In a few hours after the plowing the

ground is often covered with fine webs; delicate springes, perhaps, with which to catch the swarming gnats and flies.

Cannot you read yonder furrowed field? If the early Greeks wrote their language from right to left and from left to right, alternately, the system resembling, as they thought, the turnings made by the oxen in plowing (*Boustrophedon*), why should not the plowshare be likened to an immense pen or style, and the field which it traverses to a written page, — or at least to a ruled page, in which sundry themes of great antiquity are copied in endless repetition? A plowed field is a writing of the palimpsest sort, in which year after year one theme is erased to give place to another, not a trace of the earlier hieroglyphic remaining. In the "rotation of crops," the order is, commonly, corn, oats, wheat, grass or clover, to which procession the plow fixes the period. To me, there is something of poetic justice in the precedence given, in this agricultural series, to the red man's plant: it is as though the virgin soil refused to be propitiated, or tamed to other use, until Indian Mondamin had been commemorated in the plumed and pennoned ranks of the maize.

At any rate, it is recognized as good farming strategy to set the native plant to subdue the soil for the adoptive cereals.

Not all the fields which I have seen plowed this season are to be sown or planted. Some must run a course of discipline under the harrow, to rid them of the weeds they have gathered. Some worn fields, for good service done, are granted a time for rest, to lie in the sunshine and mellow during the longest days of the year; though no harvests be ripened here, this season, the soil itself is ripening. With these seemingly idle fields I have great sympathy. Pegasus plows for summer fallow.

How luxurious the feeling of the dew in the first April nights! How winding and insinuating the April zephyr, kissing with moist infantine lips! The sharp-eyed winter stars are all gone under the west. No more hurling of frost javelins and jagged meteor lances, but, instead, the soft descent of humid beams that have been filtered through the same sieve that strains the dew. If you require an additional proof of the season's settled good faith, if you would have the spring well indorsed, walk under the trees this evening, and observe if

anything forbids your progress. Nothing but a slight ticklish thread stretched across your eyelids, like the gentlest premonition of sleep. That will do. That is the spider's indorsement of the spring. When she harnesses her loom, and begins her season's weaving, you may be sure she has had favorable advices from the head weather-clerk. But now the spring comes on only too rapidly; we cannot stay the delicious immaturity and tenderness of the year, though we deplore their passing, as mothers do the "growing up" of their children. Out come the leaves, limp and weak at first (like butterflies just escaped from the pupa-case); not yet green but amber-colored, it would appear that they have known nothing of the winter's siege, but have come from a dream-world of sunshine, steeped in its warm light. A new sound is in the air, — the fluttering, uncertain speech of the young leaves.

UNDER THE SKY.

In the ancient poets the supreme deity is often put for the sky, the recognized empire of that deity. There was not only a fair-weather Jove but a foul-weather Jove, a rainy Jupiter and an arid Jupiter; besides, a cloud-driver and a lightener; in every phase of the weather, a god present and regnant. Somehow, in all ages, spiritual heaven has been confusedly associated with the physical heavens. That intuitive religion fixes the home of the Supreme and the Unknown in regions far supramundane is shown in the natural ritual of the eyes and hands in prayer. There was a fine and high symbolism expressed in the architecture of the old hypæthral temples, built as they were without roof, and open to the light and breath of heaven, to the storm as well as to the serene azure. Who could not have worshiped there without compromise to his faith? And yet such a temple would hardly have been hypæthral enough for our devouter mo-

ments; nothing less than all out-of-doors would have satisfied.

Would you for a while shut out the earth and fill your eye with the heavens, lie down, some summer day, on the great mother's lap, with a soft grass pillow under your head; then look around and above you, and see how slight, apparently, is your terrestrial environment, how foreshortened has become the foreground, — only a few nodding bents of blossomed grass, a spray of clover with a bumble-bee probing for honey, and in the distance, perhaps, the billowy outline of the diminished woods. What else you see is the blue of heaven illimitably stretched above and around you. You seem to be lying not so much on the surface of earth as at the bottom of the sky. Under this still, transparent sea, "deeper than did ever plummet sound," your own thoughts and imaginings have become a treasure-trove of inestimable wealth and rarity. You do not care to move, lest in so doing you break the deep sky charm, and your treasure-trove vanish. An interval of sky-gazing might well be recommended as a palliative in exaggerated cases of irritability. Let the patient bathe his fevered or lacerated soul in the

third and highest heaven, and see what oblivious comfort he will experience. No individual grievance, crying lustily at the earth's surface, but if it turn its face upward, the serenity of heaven will smile it out of countenance, and send it away shrunken and abashed. A child once assured me that "blue eyes come from looking at the sky a great deal, — until your eyes get full of the sky." Few are the blue-eyed people who are so from much visual communion with the open heavens.

We can scarcely believe that any mortal lives under fairer skies than ours. On the Atlantic coast they cannot see more orient sunrises, or on the Pacific sunsets more occidental. Nowhere else does the winter zenith, untracked by the low sun, show a wilder and lovelier depth of azure. We might have had a satiety of fair-weather skies, if there had not been interspersed with these a thrilling variety of inclement skies. Nowhere else have been seen sublimer confusions of storm-clouds cut by more trenchant and beautiful lightnings. If we do not live on the sea-coast, we are at least admirably situated on the sky-coast. The airy and the azure sea everywhere flows in. Projecting into it, the

mountains may be reckoned as bold headlands and promontories, on which the cloud armadas drive and go to pieces; the hills are gently curving capes, and all hollow intervals are the gulfs, bays, and inlets of heaven. All is sky-coast; no inland, unless it be in earth, — the mine and the cavern. Entering the latter, with a lighted torch in hand, you are likely to discover in the roof an illusory heaven, a crystal-studded counterfeit of night and the stars.

Each season — it might almost be said each month — has its peculiar sky-and-cloud scene. The time of year is kept in the heavens as well as upon the earth. These shifting, semi-lucent, many-tinted clouds (pale rose, amber, lilac, and even greenish) belong unmistakably to the skies of April. There we read tender and delicate prophecy of the earliest flowers, arbutus, anemone, cress, and violet, and the light, cold leafage with which they are mingled in forest ways. The June sky shows the least admixture of red. Is it not possible that the common atmosphere has become so diaphanous that we look through it into very ether? How quickly the clouds dissolve in it, even as flakes of snow dissolve in some still and

dark mountain spring! Those vanishing flecks and films of white give fitting body to the poet's dream of

> "Spirits that lie
> In the azure sky
> When they love, but live no more."

After the month of June the atmosphere loses much of its marvelous purity and transparency. It is another sky which bends over the shorn and sheaved fields than that which hung above green meadows and grain-fields in fragrant blossom. In July the noon heavens are a realization of white heat. If there is ripeness in the fields of earth, there is also ripeness in the fields of air; the opulence of harvest is matched by rich, warm, and tremulous skies, by sunsets more lavish in pageantry. At night the moon rolls up her disk, large and fervid, as though rising from regions of perpetual summer midday. The skies of autumn, when not veiled in mist, and when foiled by the crimsons, russets, and yellows of the frost-bitten woodlands, show a deeper and intenser blue than the skies of June. Deeper still are those glimpses of blue seen through ragged cracks in the dun and gray clouds in midwinter; narrow and devious rivers they

seem, lost between frowning cañon-walls. I remember a wild sky at the breaking up of winter, in which the clouds lay in serried masses of uniform curve and shading; the whole heavens, thus masked, presenting the appearance of a "chopped sea" whose waves were held in frozen abeyance. Sometimes the cloud-work of the winter sky suggests medallions of ivory or agate carved upon lapis lazuli, so vivid is the contrast between cloud and sky; and sometimes, watching the frail clouds that swiftly cross the face of the winter moon, and for an instant kindle with iridescent light, I am reminded of these lines from "The Blessed Damozel": —

> "And the souls mounting up to God
> Went by her like thin flames."

No weather observations are so likely to be casually and carelessly made as those which refer to the sky, The chronicler of a perfect day usually begins with the specification that "there was not a cloud to be seen;" but it is highly probable that, if he had searched the horizon, he would have detected some nebulous straw sufficient to show the drift of the wind. Sometimes there will be formed in the upper regions of the sky a thin, unobvious scarf of vapor, not unlike

the magnified texture of crape, or the finest and softest rolls of wool.

The clouds of night take the posture of rest, stretching themselves out along the horizon, as though to make earth their couch. The clouds of the daytime are rolling and augmentative, erecting themselves in dome-like masses. A favorite harborage for the great cumulus fleets is just above the south-eastern horizon. There they remain half a sultry summer day, often threatening with harmless lightning-flashes the rain which does not come. These clouds are full of pictorial and sculptural suggestion. There may be seen the plump cherubs in which the old masters delighted, the confused tumblings of Phaëthon and his horses, or the gods and heroes of the Elgin marbles in all their mutilated and pathetic grandeur. We see in the clouds whatever our own imagination, or that of another, bids us see; some new semblance unfolding itself with every alteration of the vapory outline. "Do you see yonder cloud that 's almost in shape of a camel?" "By the mass, and 't is like a camel, indeed." "Methinks it is like a weasel." "It is backed like a weasel." "Or like a whale?" "Very like a whale." Ten to one, the eye

of old Polonius sympathetically verified the successive images suggested by the skipping fancy of Hamlet. Once attempting to sketch a glittering cumulus dome, as it slowly built itself up from the horizon, I found I had upon my drawing-paper not a bad representation of the rolling lines of foliage, — an argentine forest of the sky. As the cloud continued rising, it seemed at length to have turned round in some degree, one side receding while the other came into fuller display. Thus it was suggested that clouds may have thickness as well as mere surface, and that, could one sail the heavens, the farther coast of many a nubilous land would invite him with its havens. Having piled Ossa upon Pelion, the cumulus cloud usually topples over, and lies in giantesque confusion along the horizon, or it falls to rise again somewhere along the extended line of its base.

The sailor, of necessity, has a more intimate acquaintance than the landsman with the physical signs of heaven. How shall he be advised of approaching danger if not by reading the bulletins of the sky and the clouds? On the barren plain around him are no trees to hint of rain by showing the white under-side of their leaves; no baro-

metrical flowers, like the dandelion and chickweed, to give warning with their quick-closing eyelids. The mariner may be presumed to know the tonnage of every cloud sighted on the upper deep, whether the cargo be wind, rain, or rattling hail. The complexion of the cloud also advises him of its friendliness or its hostility, just as the colors run up on the mast of a passing vessel would indicate the home port and nationality of the crew. The sailor may well keep a keen outlook on the sky and its forces of cloud: he sails the sea, but he sails by the heavens. The great element, in whose mercy he directly lies, is itself at the mercy of a wider and more potential element; for the sea, vast body of inanity as it is, is incapable of injury except at the instigation of Euroclydon and his fellows. "There comes that gang again," a veteran admiral was in the habit of saying when the winds rose, and a great storm was upon his track.

It is seldom that with high winds we have a bright and cloudless sky. The wind does not hunt for nothing. Sometimes it seems to be routing and dispersing the clouds for no other purpose than to accomplish their fright and discomfiture; to compare great

things with small, it takes them in its teeth, and gives them the terrier grip, shaking and tearing them into a thousand tatters. Other times, with what one might imagine a herding instinct, it gently but forcibly drives together the stragglers from all quarters of the sky, collecting them in close ranks along the horizon. Then, often, we see

> "The cloudy rack slow journeying in the west,
> Like herded elephants."

Science has been charged with many deeds of vandalism and desecration. "There was an awful rainbow once in heaven," the poet tells us; but in the next line we learn that its strands have been unbraided, and that now it is mentioned "in the dull catalogue of common things." The last time the rainbow showed herself in our heavens, I was satisfied that science might be acquitted; that nothing had ever been subtracted from the mysterious and unsearchable beauty of the seven-tinted arch. Old as the flood, it is the same brilliant new wonder to us as to the children of Noah. If they construed it for a promise, we may interpret it as a record. Hanging aloft is the palette with the ranged and graded colors which were used in the painting of the world: the red and

the yellow of the adust and tawny sands and of the earth's volcanic heart-fires; next, the green, from which were laid on the drapery tints worn by the fields, the woods, and the smooth shoulders of the hills; last of all, the blue and cool amethystine shades of the distant ocean, of the high, airy mountains, and the sky itself. Though reserved as the pendant of the summer rain-cloud, we not infrequently see, in other phases of the weather, fugitive gleams and traces of the messenger sprite. In winter, a bank of clouds will often be overshot with a flickering iridescence, whence the "mother o' pearl flocks" that some one has so aptly noted. Lunar halos and those spectral appearances observed near the sun (familiarly spoken of as "sun dogs") all wear, in some degree, the livery of the rainbow.

While we traverse the sky in vision and fancy only, we are aware that more practical voyagers are abroad. Yonder hawk, floating about like a pennon detached from the staff, seems to keep aloft not so much by his own exertions as by his being lighter than the element in which he moves. Raptorial and cruel as he is known to be, he still embodies, as no other winged creature

can, the serene vitality and elasticity of the air. If not the bird of Jove, he must belong to some of the Immortals. Is not a bird amphibious, a creature of two lives, one upon the earth and another in the sky? Its nidification in the tree-top or on the crag, on the very hem or fringe of the earth, bespeaks it more an aerial than a terrestrial citizen. The finding of a dead bird is always, to me, something of a surprise and painful shock. It had wings; then why did it not get safely out of the way of mortal calamity? I should like to credit that old myth of the phœnix and its fiery rejuvenation. A bird should not die, but be translated: the eagle to the storm cloud, the brilliant tanager and oriole to the flame of the evening sky, and the bluebird to its native cerulean.

At sunrise and sunset the imagination becomes more venturous. The horizon gates being open for the passage of the sun, it slips through, steals his skiff, and sets sail for the shores of fable. Does the sun go down, great-sphered and cloudless, through a field of clear gold, imagination pursues, and sees him traversing the Pacific, lighting to-morrow as he goes.

"Here sunset; sunrise on Cathayan strand . . .
And now, day springs to Himalaya's crest . . .
Now, wakes the lotus on old Nilus' breast:
Yon orbèd portal opes on Morning Land, —
The East beyond the West."

From what point of view do we observe that the sun goes *under* the cloud? Strange inversion of fact! With our heads to the nadir, our feet to the zenith, there would be pertinence in such an observation. It is some cheer to know that, in spite of our topsy-turvy notions of cosmos, the sun never does go under, but always over, the clouds. We alone are under the clouds, — "under the weather."

THE RAIN AND THE FINE WEATHER.

In looking over my year-book, I find no entry recording a holiday spoiled by the rain, while numerous instances are noted of holidays gained from that source. Wherefore "la pluie et le beau temps" of the sweeping Gallic phrase are in my version freely rendered as equivalents; or, at least, the rain is regarded as one phase of that fine weather which we enjoy the whole year round. How can I entirely sympathize with those who reckon their time by a sun-dial, and boast it as a virtue that they "count the bright hours only"? The sun-dial and the bright hours are well, but I should be loath to repudiate those gray and lowering hours in which the countenance of our thoughts so easily outshines that of the weather, — some of the more radiant days being, perhaps, a trifle too vivid for our ordinary spiritual habit. If I keep a sun-dial, I have also a tower of the winds and a mu-

sical clepsydra, the latter propelled directly by the cascade from heaven; thus I think to deal equitably by all hours and seasons.

Our roof-trees grow dense and dark above us, every year more and more shutting off the prospect skyward. Thanks to the rain that we are occasionally called out to inspect the "brave o'erhanging firmament;" for who is not concerned to watch the arrival and unlading of the great galleys which bring us our fresh and soft water supplies? Frowns and corrugations on the face of heaven shall succeed in commanding our attention, where ten days together of ethereal smiles and tenderness shall fail. There is one pleasure in the rain itself, and another in anticipating it by predictions. Distant be the day when the spectroscope, with its "rain band" indicator, shall come into general use, superseding oral prognostication. When this day arrives, it will be to the grief and confusion of those clever meteorologists who are found in every neighborhood. After all, will the gain in scientific certitude compensate for the loss of pleasure to be derived from pure speculation? Notwithstanding the superior skepticism with which we meet the dicta of our familiar

weather oracle, there is commonly a kernel of natural philosophy as well as natural poetry within the absurd envelope of vulgar tradition. Most of the twelve cardinal rain signs enumerated in the Georgics are still in good repute. "Never hath a shower hurt any person unforewarned." It took me some time to probe to the probable origin of the saying with regard to the new moon and the Indian's powder-horn. Why, indeed, should that aboriginal worthy hang the powder-horn upon a dry rather than a wet moon? The mystery was cleared up for me on my hearing a hunter express his preference for wet weather, as then the leaves on the forest floor, being moist, would not rustle under foot, and betray his presence to the game. Of course, the woodcrafty Indian knew this fact, and took advantage of it; he would, therefore, have his powder-horn in use during a wet time, but in the dry would naturally suspend it on the convenient lunar peg! True, there are those who have no respect for this trite omen, having from their own experience evolved a more likely system of prognostics. I have a neighbor who asks no stronger argument in favor of rain than to see his dog

eat grass. Another observer is specially in the confidence of the "line storm" agent, and has been assured that the direction of the wind during this period "pretty nearly" determines the direction in which we are to look for all the storms of the season following. Still another, unconsciously verifying the Emersonian maxim, hitches the wagon of his weather faith to a shooting-star. A transcendental farmer he, whose vane is the meteor's dart shot into the teeth of the approaching but yet invisible storm; where the star falls, from that quarter he anticipates the next rough weather. This is the farmer who plants his apple-trees at a slight deflection from the vertical, so that their tops shall exactly indicate the "two o'clock sun." The trees are thus, as he argues, given a westing, so that all the strong prevailing winds from that quarter can do is to lift them to a perpendicular position, by the time they are full-grown. This system of planting, though it may be good arboriculture, would go far towards doing away with the picturesque wryness of the apple orchard.

It may be questioned whether the clouds of heaven have their favorite lanes and by-

ways marked out on the map of the country over which they pass, yet I frequently hear that the rain "follows the river." If this be true, the rain has a sufficiently puzzling route, as the river in question abhors a right line, and delights to double upon itself as often as it can. It is to be remarked that the Lake (Erie), but a few miles distant, is not popularly held to have such a following as is claimed for its humble tributary. No local savant can satisfactorily apologize for the slight. I am assured by one living near the river that lightning strikes in its vicinity more frequently than elsewhere; that the chestnut oftener than any other tree, except the hemlock, is the mark of the thunderbolt; and that the beech enjoys a singular immunity from danger, — so much so that my informant would not believe, on report, that a beech had been struck, but would require to see the mischief with his own eyes. It would be an entertaining, and perhaps not unprofitable, task to edit the science and pseudo-science in common circulation within the area of a single county, township, or district.

"The former and the latter rains" play the same part in the year's tillage as they

did when the first furrows were drawn in the earth. The spring still comes riding in on the moist surges of the south wind, and the departing summer, also, goes by water, embarking on the tumbling flood of the big September storm. Though one season indulges in a reckless expenditure of moisture and another pinches us with drought, we are pretty sure that the account balances. If any region, formerly well supplied with rain, has come to suffer from aridity, it is probably because the forests, those natural well-sweeps connecting with the heavenly cisterns, have been cut down. A pity it is that their hydraulic action is not visible in some such way as the sun and his specious water-buckets, so that man should be advised by self-interest to stay his inroads upon the sylvan territory. Is the rain sent alike upon the just and the unjust? There is one class of the unjust, namely, the timber destructionists, who are likely to bring about a reversal of the old benevolent decree.

It is a little strange that the poets, while so free to praise the summer rain, should have nothing to say about rain in winter. Have they not heard the wild hunter, who,

with his rattling shot, brings down the coveys of the frost, — the headlong charioteer cracking his thousand whips in the vacant air, unintercepted by leafy branches? How his lashes score and lacerate the earth's false cuticle of ice and snow, until the quick is reached, and dormant vitality excited! In every February rain faint vernal rumors are heard, and cipher despatches are sent to the initiated. The rain in March brings overbold declaration for spring, afterwards diplomatically offset by an occasional demonstration in honor of winter. I am sorry for those who fail to perceive the honest stuff there is in March, who can never get along with his chaff and swagger. It must be that Nature relishes the extravagant impersonations of this actor, else he would not be encouraged to remain so long upon the scene, or be so frequently recalled, — "With hey, ho, the wind and the rain!" As yet, the skies are not blue, but only blue-eyed, the azure seen in glimpses through the clouds as through rough eye-sockets. The fields present an unfamiliar topography, all depressions having been filled up by the rain. A pool thus formed is a kaleidoscope of color and motion: the wind produces on

its surface a veiny arabesque, and at one side of the margin the breaking of the ocean surf is imitated. Every gust darkens it most wonderfully, as though there had been thrown into the water some instantly dissolving pigment. This sudden depth of shade is due to the bulk of the water having been swept aside, thus destroying the glaze of reflected light, and revealing the dark bottom of the pool. "The river is bluer than the sky" is good painting. Heaven, as seen in the watery mirror, is always deeper in hue than the actual sky. Whence is the mordant used to set this dye? If there be any hair-line rift in the clouds through which a blue ray can fall, trust the rain-pool to detect and report it with liberal exaggeration. One will often be baffled in his search for the zenith to match the smiling under-heaven laid open in the transient perspective-glass at his feet. With no small speculative delight have I seen the village, after an abundant rain, apparently built over a celestial abysm, and threatening every moment to fall and disappear over the frail earth-verge. The more frequent the pools, the more extensive is the downward aerial prospect, and the more exquisite the

sense of suspension between two infinities. To my surprise, the passers-by seemed wholly oblivious to the fine peril which threatened, as they plodded their way through the unsolid streets, grumbling at the inefficiency of the road supervisor.

April comes,

> "With boweriness and showeriness
> And rare delights of rain."

Mantling in the sun's warmth, and daily replenished, the pasture pools are now, at the surface, rinks for the nimble gyrations of various water-flies, while below swarm the fairy shrimps, simulating the fin-waving life of the fish. In their green translucency they look not unlike animated bits of some pulpy, aquatic plant, so that the name of the order, *phyllopoda*, is well illustrated by this species. In one season of unusual mildness, I knew these creatures to make their appearance as early as the middle of February.

Rain in April! Who knows not the capricious, partial shower that runs out in shining array under review of the sun, advancing a furlong or so, then stopping short, as though recalled by solar command? Not a yard further will the precious moisture go,

however the mouth of Nature may water in expectation. I hear the ever-thirsty grass, with a slight, tremulous sigh, express its disappointment and sense of neglect. There is a copious drinker! I almost think to measure the depth of the rainfall by ascertaining the liquid contents in the brimming tube of a blade of grass. In the space between morning and evening, it has plainly lifted itself higher, and acquired a livelier color.

After a parched interval, with what alertness we look and listen for indications of rain! — not, however, forgetting to remind each other that "all signs fail in dry weather." We are fain to credit the "more wet" of the quail, the ceaseless trilling of the tree-frog, the chuckle of the cuckoo, and the shutting of various sunny eyes in the grass. We also take fresh hope when the trees that have so long stood sultrily immobile begin swaying tumultuously, uttering hoarse, delirious murmurs of anticipation. Yet we have often before seen this majestically looming cloud break and dissolve in gusty sighs, without showing any practical benevolence. We do not expect much from these sparse, loud-clicking drops, sown

broadcast, like a handful of pluvial "small change," or beggars' pence, just to test Nature's alacrity in picking up alms. Falling in the fine dust of the road, they are at once absorbed, curiously dotting or stippling the powdery surface; falling on the leaves, which the drought has rendered tense and crisp, like a sort of drum parchment, they beat a brisk, urgent tattoo; the grass blades seem to dodge the sharp fusillade. The looming cloud, for once, does not disappoint us, but ascends, and spreads rapidly a gray, uniform canopy. When the lightning flashes, it advises us there is brilliant repartee in the heavens. What a keen *jeu d'esprit* was this last! In the soul is a spark of venturous, fiery wit, which, in spite of the mortal body's fear, starts up to fence with the lightning, singing, as the shaft flies past, "Strike me, and I strike back!" Now comes the rain, a celestial ocean at flood-tide. It has its surges and billows, its mighty "third waves," its momentary lulls and recessions. How far is it through this liquid obscurity up to the azure and the sunbeam? We will walk abroad under the rain, like divers in the pearl gulfs; we will take a surf bath, where nothing is lacking

but the saline taste: for, if this be not a true sea in which we disport, it is at least the returning wave of sublimated lakes and rivers, the refunded tribute of the naiads and of the earth.

Even in this temperate latitude we frequently have, at the beginning of a summer storm, an interval of elemental chaos that would do credit to a Central American *temporal*. The trees rock and bend, leaning to the leeward, with all their foliage blown out, like a garment, in one direction, revealing their lithe and robust anatomy. What admirable elasticity and dexterous trimming to the storm are seen among these hardy, long-disciplined Spartans of Nature! Occasionally a young tree, deficient in athletic training, is snapped off at the ankle; and as though the storm carried a pruning-knife, and this were the month for pruning, numerous small branches, twigs, and single leaves are remorselessly shorn away and scattered to the winds. After a continued rain, such as in June lodges the crops, the infinite rank growth of leafage seems completely to muffle up the world.

> "The boweriness and floweriness
> Make one abundant heap."

The trees are heavy and torpid with moisture; there is no motion in the foliage, except as some terminal leaf twinkles in discharging a drop larger than usual. The rain trickles down the rough, swollen bark, finding its way by casual channels, as the water from a spring drips through the loose black clods of a shaded hill-side. A momentary jet rises wherever a drop falls on a hard surface. Well-washed stones become dark and semi-reflective, showing, like a roiled stream, distorted and indistinct images of surrounding objects. The long undulation of meadows and grain-fields, the liquescent greens of the landscape, faintly seen through the waving veil of the rain, suggest a submarine vegetation swept by a gale of waters. When there is no wind, the rain is of such temper that we characterize it as "gentle;" it then comes serenely down by a direct path; when set on by the wind, it drives in keen oblique splinters. Sometimes there is a crossing of lances, as though two rain armies were in the field. If the eye is rejoiced at the descending shower, the ear also has its share of pleasure. From all sides comes up the whispered acclamation of a million grateful leaves.

We infer their gratitude, as in any human crowd we understand the drift of communication, though unable to distinguish individual voices. After listening a while to this comfortable susurrus of the leaves, we seem to hear a monotonous rhythm, to which we readily set symphonious words, or syllables, without meaning. Whatever the style of parley the rain may hold with the sea or with the open prairie, its loquacity must always be sweetest in a wooded country. The senses of sight and hearing are not the only ones regaled at this time. Before the rain comes the breath of the rain, bringing flavorous news from all lush places in the woods and pastures. Virgil's farmer knew what it meant when he saw his cattle "snuff the air with wide-open nostrils." In the first rain of autumn, after intense summer heat, the leaves of the maple give out a subtle aroma, as if the essential principle of the sap and tissues had been volatilized; though already burnt in the summer's censer, their ashes are fragrant when put into solution by the rain.

Nature is on good terms with her children on a rainy day, seeming to treat it as a *dies non*, giving herself up to their amusement.

If we are not afraid of a wetting, we may meet some very pretty gossips abroad, since we are not alone in our enjoyment of the rain and fine weather. The robin shows himself preëminently a rain-bird. He takes a position as nearly vertical as possible, so as to shed the water, his plumage growing darker for the drenching. He has moistened his whistle (as the flute-player moistens his flute), and is now blowing out the superfluous drops in a series of mellow dissyllabic notes, somewhat more pensive and refined than his ordinary efforts. He sings the lyric of the rain. A "sprinkle" encourages rather than interrupts the chimney-swifts in their airy pursuit of food; and the more familiar sparrows dart under the eaves, into porches, even alighting on window-sills, in quest of insects that have sought shelter in these places. In the orchard the wren is on the alert, scrambling along the leaning trunk with the dexterity of the woodpecker or the creeper, and peering into every nook and cranny of the bark. He, too, is foraging, yet — that he may not be accused of being wholly absorbed in this sordid occupation — from time to time pipes a moist and rippling stave, whose "expres-

sion mark" might be *allegretto grazioso.* At the first report of rain, our old doorside friend, the toad, exhibits all the delight possible to an organization so cold and phlegmatic. His yellow sides and throat seem to throb with excitement, as he comes out of his hermitage in the mould of a neglected flower-pot. As soon as wet, his spotted mosaic coat becomes brighter, resembling in color and markings some freaked pebble washed up by the waves. With an eye to business (he is possibly something of a savant, and counts upon the present atmospheric condition as favorable to his fly-catching enterprise), he gathers himself up and hurries into the grass, looping himself along by his long, ridiculous legs.

While these visible rillets of the rain are making their way, with much frothing and bubbling, to some permanent vein of water, one imagines the streams underground rejoicing, in their own dark, voiceless way, at the reinforcement they receive. For hours afterward I taste the river of heaven in water from the well. Some time ago I made the discovery of a music-box or whispering gallery of the rain, which I had passed a hundred times without suspecting its mu-

sical capacity. It is entirely subterranean, with a tube or shaft connecting it with the surface. Laying my ear to this, I hear a succession of delicious melodies, abounding in trills, turns, grace-notes, and broken chords, in which the last fine high note is followed by an echo. It is Nicor, chief of water-sprites, sitting in a cavern and playing liquid chimes, laughing to himself during the rests! The mason who constructed this music-box with bricks and mortar thought only to produce a cistern, not dreaming of the acoustic luxury that should result from his labors. This is the clepsydra that keeps the rainy hours, dropping the minutes and seconds in a silver or crystal coinage of sound.

After the rain, fine weather indeed! With the sun shining and the wind blowing, the drenched trees simulate a showery heaven, and sprinkle the ground beneath them. Our eyes go searching among the glistening leaves to see if there be not an embowered rainbow. If it clears off late in the day, a certain wistful beauty in the freshened landscape speaks of the "green afternoon" that

"Turns toward sunset, and is loth to die."

THE SENSITIVE PLANT.

A CURIOUS and beautiful little plant is the mimosa, but if it could be rendered spontaneous in my garden I would not encourage its growing there; to be continually offending so delicate a creature would be far from pleasant. The same consideration might warrant one's hesitating to cultivate in his garden of choice acquaintances many human counterparts of the genus mimosa. These sensitive plants, by reason of the tender, irritable surface they present, always manage to convince us, while we are with them, that our moral touch is exceptionally harsh and clumsy. We are not aware of having given offense until we see the recoil of the sensitive plant, — its leaves shrinking and folding together, retiring about the stem; until we meet, instead of genial reciprocity, a precipitate withdrawing of our friend's personality into itself, all kindly mutualities being temporarily suspended. How much patient adroitness it takes to bring

back *in statu quo* our relations with the wounded, only those know who have had to deal with the plant. We have referred, casually, to some contemporaneous instance, or have passed criticism upon remote affairs or persons, or have drawn a harmless, humorous characterization, when, *presto*, our listener feels a hand laid upon him. He never "gives away the sermon," but takes all to himself; and the humorous characterization, also, he contrives to carry off, to his own discomfiture. And we are left to plead guilty to an ugly *gaucherie!* If the sensitive plant would only consider of what misery it is the cause! But that is rarely the nature of the plant; it has little power to exchange places with another, little imagination where itself is not immediately concerned. After some not unuseful experience of its peculiarities, it has dawned upon us that selfishness is the big tap-root which feeds the germination and morbid growth of such sensitiveness. We have found the tenderness of the plant to be directly increased by any access of tenderness in the care bestowed upon it; on the other hand, we have seen plants rendered wonderfully hardy through a little salutary neglect on the part

of the gardener. What, indeed, can you expect of a tenderling that is kept sheltered as much as possible from all vexing contact, — that the noon sun and stormy elements are not allowed to reach? Perceiving that you expect it to shrink at your touch, while you cry out with admiration of its extreme delicacy, the plant determines never to disappoint your expectation. If its phenomena were uniformly passed by unremarked, such treatment, we believe, would go far towards modifying its unhappy nature. This is one of the instances in which clemency is cruelty; since to humor your sensitive friend is to help confirm him in the error of his ways. If you follow our advice, when the plant exhibits signs of agitation you will not protest that you spoke or acted with the best intention in the world; you will not dwell upon the fact of your continued esteem and affection for the injured one, nor will you denounce yourself for a miserable blunderer. On the contrary, if you can bring yourself to the point of behaving with crispness, — nay, even with some barbarity, — do so, and deserve credit for your courage and candid benevolence. Tell your friend that he is not a sensitive plant, but a nettle, whose ir-

ritable papillæ both wound and are wounded by whoever ventures near. If your patient has a right constitution, he will thrive under this heroic treatment, and be grateful, by and by, for the rigor practiced by his physician. The man who labored under the delusion that he was glass, on being restored to sanity ought not to grumble over the contusions given him in order to dispel his vitreous theory.

It might not be amiss to lay down a rule: Doubt those persons who are frequently given to the confession that they are sensitive, — far too sensitive for their own good. (The latter half of the statement is true enough, but not in the sense intended by them.) If they were indeed as sensitive as they would have us believe, the fact would have to be ascertained in some other way than through oral acknowledgment. Having to deal with them, we probably find that what they mistake in themselves for fine spiritual acumen and sensibility is something very akin to jealousy, — an ungenerous distrustfulness of nature. "To cherish good hopes, and to believe I am loved by my friends," — recommended by no less authority than Marcus Antoninus, — is an excellent specific

in these aggravated cases. Who that maintains continual bivouac, lest at some unguarded moment he fall victim to Punic faith, is a suitable candidate for any of the ingenuous offices of friendship? He is undoubtedly too wary and suspicious (not sensitive) for his own good. The only admirable order of sensitiveness is that to which the Apostle's definition of charity is applicable. Like that Christian virtue, it suffers long, is patient, vaunteth not itself. It has a shy "elvish face," and is not to be met with upon the street. It so sedulously hides itself that the kindest house-mate impinges on it unawares. It has a rare aptitude for vicarious suffering, and every day immolates itself, unthanked, for some one. It supposes every one it meets to be endowed with as thin a skin as its own, and is therefore constantly on its guard to commit no cruelty. Often it absurdly overrates the tender susceptibility of others; takes superfluous pains to direct its eye-shot well above any physical or moral imperfection of its neighbor, and in any company is always "heading off" the conversation, lest it range over the opinions and prejudices of those present. So vivid is its dramatic imagination that it is some-

times perilously near sympathizing with depravity, its manners becoming infected with the neighboring baseness. Then its behavior is not unlike that of Christabel, who unconsciously narrowed her eye, and repeated the vicious glance of the serpent-lady. Not only does it throw itself for a shield before pachyderms, but it would outdo its lovers in kind offices. It bears not to be overpraised, dreading unjust eulogy more than unjust censure. To be sensitive! 'T is to have all the senses keenly alive to report to the spirit the nature of all spiritual contacts.

Genuine sensitiveness parries discovery by a variety of ingenious methods, one of which is to announce its complete imperviousness; it bids you feel the rhinoceros rings and bosses it has put on, intending to pass them for its natural habit. To conclude, we give the testimony with which a sensitive plant lately favored us: "It is the frank and egotistic behavior I have adopted, of late years, that makes it seem easy to lay hands upon my heart and life; but I find the device protective, and the hurts I receive are far less painful than they used to be."

GRASS: A RUMINATION.

I guess it is the handkerchief of the Lord,
A scented gift and remembrancer, designedly dropped,
Bearing the owner's name someway in the corners,
That we may see and remark, and say, *Whose?*

WALT WHITMAN.

THE eye and the ear are inveterate hobbyists. This peculiarity in his perceptive faculties the observer of nature and the seasons must frequently have occasion to remark: one phase of growing life, one set of objects in the landscape, shall often so engage his attention as to render him comparatively dull to other impressions. The new season comes, clothing with wonder the whole woodland; but, for some unassignable reason, the observer finds nothing so salutary and pleasing to his eye as willow-green; or, among all the surprises of vernation, he has regard only toward the hickory's richly colored buds, which seem to promise not mere leaves, but a blossom of royal dyes and dimensions; or, from among the various delicacies of vernal bloom in field and wood, his

eye curiously singles out and visits with favor a flower with no more pretensions to beauty than the little pale starveling, plantain-leaved everlasting. "No doubt the blue and the yellow violets are abundant, but I happen to have seen only the white, fragrant kind, this spring," remarked one who looked with a loving prejudice. I do not account for these prepossessions and partialities; if I could account for them, I should understand why, during the season past, Nature's great commoner, the Grass, should have spoken with such unusual eloquence, convincing me that never before had I seen half its graces and virtues. Something, then, I have lately learned regarding

> "the hour
> Of splendor in the grass"

(supposed indeed to have been lost with our earlier Intimations of Immortality), and I may venture to corroborate the Orphic strain which bids us believe that

> "the poor grass shall plot and plan
> What it shall do when it is man."

Being advised of this plotting and planning, it seemed possible to equal such foresight and sagacity by entertaining some speculations as to what poor man shall do when he

is grass (if the road of this metempsychosis were traversable in both directions). That which all our lives we have under our feet is at length set above our heads, — the softly moving janitor, that follows us and shuts the gate opened for our mortal passing — the light touch soon removing all traces of the wound received by earth, when our sleeping chamber was delved. In fine, still weather you may lie close to the low gate, and, so lying, feel peace and comfort gliding in upon every sense ; but do not venture, in any form, to repeat the old prayer, " Leeve moder, let me in ! " lest the grass should hear, and, understanding the mother's sign, gather around, and quickly close over your repining humanity.

Plainly, the grass has its secrets ; and subtlety and evasiveness characterize all its behavior. It trembles at the slightest solicitation of the breeze, yet is there no sound arising from its agitation ; herein it differs from the frank loquacity of the leaves of a tree. The stridulous gossip of the myriads that shelter among its blades only accentuates the silence of the grass. What busy traffic, what ecumenical gatherings, what cabals of the insect world, it could re-

port! Probably no pageant in fairy-land, could we obtain a pass into that jealous Chinese precinct, would be so well worth our admiration as would the hourly life of the inhabitants of this small plot of grass, when once we were inducted into its mysteries. The spirit of the greensward! Of what were the Greek poets thinking when, having assigned a naiad to every stream and a dryad to every tree, they forgot to give the grass its deity? If the goddess Ceres ever held this position, she has since forfeited it by her partiality towards the grain-bearing grasses, she having bestowed her name upon these; whence *cereals* they still remain.

The grasses carry a free lance in all parts of the globe. In temperate climates alone are found those by nature fitted to unite in close, cæspitous communities; weavers, they, of the rich, seamless garment which Earth loves to have spread over her old shoulders. When turf is transplanted, with what aptness of brotherly love do root and root hasten to knit themselves together, as though with the grass had originated the maxim, In union is strength! If I lived in the builded desert called city, I would give myself the luxury of an oasis; and if this were a scant

one (perhaps a window-garden), and if limited to a single kind of vegetation, I would choose a strip of green turf; sure, so long as this flourished, that my connection with the country would not be wholly lost. If the city's poor and depraved might but have the gospel as preached by the grass!

A family of the utmost benevolence is that of the *Gramineæ*. Out of its nearly four thousand known species only a single individual (darnel) sustains the charge of being unwholesome. The grasses are a royal society of food-purveyors, extending over the whole earth, and affording such plenitude and variety that man should not fare meagrely, even if confined for his sustenance to this one group of plants. Flour from the cereal, sugar from the cane, — strength and sweetness; with these left, what should forbid to the children of the earth their bread and treacle? And not only man, but his serviceable dumb allies, the most patient, innocent, and intelligent of the brute creation, are nourished by the bounty of the grasses. In a different sense from that intended by the Hebrew prophet might it be affirmed that "all flesh is grass," — tissue and fibre remotely spun from this stout, durable

thread. Some poor children living in a village suburb were asked what they had done at times when there had been no food in the house. "Oh, we went out-doors and ate grass," they replied, making no marvel of the case. Necessity, with a grain of salt (if necessity could afford the condiment), might perhaps manage a repast off the tenderer portions of the grass stem. A pity that Nebuchadnezzar left no record of the impressions gained during the time in which he "did eat grass as oxen, and his body was wet with the dew of heaven." While the rest of the Babylonians ate grass at a remove, by eating the ox that ate the grass, their king was getting down very close to first principles. If, by this simple gramineal diet, he did not acquire a curious ruminating knowledge which let him into the feelings and cogitations of the gentle grazing beasts, his neighbors, then the lesson of wisdom and humility must have been but imperfectly learned.

Whatever the etymological affinities of *grass*, *cresco*, and *grow*, the plant itself may be taken as the readiest and most universal type under which to represent Nature's vital, unwearying energy. The year around,

it cherishes good hopes, and continues to speak them when other plant-life is wholly silent. "The trees look like winter, but the grass is like the spring." It had hardy nurture from the beginning, the snow having cradled its seed; for the farmer thinks no time more acceptable for sowing than early in the spring, after a light snowfall. Summer's swarthy flame, and that kind of white heat which we name frost may cut off growth above ground, but such is the recuperative power at the root that but one abundant rain or but one sunshine holiday is needed to start again the "star-ypointing" spear of the grass. There is no better economist of its resources than the grass. Says Thoreau, in "Walden:" "It grows as steadily as the rill oozes out of the ground. It is almost identical with that; for in the growing days of June, when the rills are dry, the grass blades are their channels, and from year to year the herds drink at this perennial green stream." Although it is so dry to the touch, the veins of the grass are not drained. A drop of moisture collects at the base of a culm, on its being pressed between thumb and finger; and children, for sport, pit one such stem against another, to see which will carry away

its own and the other's glistening bead, — drops of the life-blood of the grass.

But here I have a good calendar to advise me whether the year runs high or low; to indicate not only the season, but the month also. It is March. I should not mistake the time, seeing those piebald locks which the earth wears: here a thread or tress of forward green, there a shock of the old dead gray or brown. It is April, — witnessed by the wild mob-rule conduct of the grass, its pushing emulousness, in which, for no plain reason, one blade outstrips by half its nearest neighbor, and no two blades show the same length. It is May (the Anglo-Saxon Month of Three Milkings), and the grass moves on, a banded strength, the inequalities it had in April having disappeared. Now, who are you, so light and expeditious, that you boast you 'll not let the grass grow under your feet? Let it! Take care, for it grows between your steps, silently mirthful, triumphant without vaunting. On a summer morning, with copious dew, the grass has its exultation. Innumerable caps of liquid hyaline I see, poised aloft on the points of innumerable bayonets. Some sudden, wild enthusiasm has seized these bladed

myrmidons; what this may be I have to fancy, and also what rallying word or note of huzza would best accord with their animated mood.

June, the Month of Roses, Meadow Month, — which shall it be? The latter, if respect be had to numbers; since what are all the roses of the world as compared with the infinite flowerage of the grasses, which this month fulfills? Think what bloom is represented by one panicle of June grass, or by one stately spire of timothy or herd's grass, with its delicate purple anthers flung out each way, like so many pennons from the windows of a tower! To the flower of the grass was given a recondite loveliness, — prize only of the faithful, refined, and loving eye, patient to investigate. Fair Science takes her little learners into the country, and there teaches them by a parable: "Consider the lilies of the field." "But," return the little learners, "we can't see any lilies." Then says smiling Science, "They are all around you;" and, gathering a stalk of blossoming grass, or, yet better, of wheat, she proceeds to divulge in its obscure and curious inflorescence vanishing traces of an ancient lily-resembling type, from which the

grasses have descended.[1] It appears that while one branch of a great botanical family rose to vie with Solomon (by their bright colors winning the admiration and friendly offices of the insect world), another branch of the family eschewed such ambitions, and obtained the wind as a lover. Science dissects the unremembering flower, and shows us by what crowding together of its parts and gradual suppressions the liliaceous form has been lost save to the nice eye of the specialist. Had not the grasses practiced humility, or had they not stooped to conquer, it might have come to pass that man had asked for bread and been given a lily.

In much the same way as he forecasts the profit he will have from the woolly flock does the farmer count upon the fleeces grown by his fields (whose shearing-time, also, is in June). There are hay-scales in his mind, and such calculation is in his eye that he can foretell with considerable accuracy and very definite cheer what will be the yield of this or that "piece," — whether a ton, ton and a half, or two tons to the acre.

Lovely and pleasant all its life, it follows

[1] See the admirable essay, "The Origin of Wheat," in Mr. Grant Allen's *Flowers and their Pedigrees.*

that the grass rejoices in a fragrant memory. Whether spread to dry in the field, or already gathered, the "goodliness thereof" goes never to waste. I think sleeping on the haymow will yet be recommended as therapeutic for any that may be "sick or melancholious;" the breath of the hay being every whit as efficacious as that Chaucerian tree whose leaves were "so very good and vertuous." Needless to gather those special herbs so much esteemed as remedies, when the barn is full of more excellent simples that cure with their aroma.

You can tell the time of year by an inspection of the barns; nor is it always necessary to see the interior. As you rode swiftly by one of these old harvest storehouses, you saw the setting sun shoot arrows of gold through the building from side to side between the warped boards. That was an evening in spring; now, in autumn, the garrison is quite impervious to all such archery, every chink and cranny being caulked with the hay, which reaches even to the high beam on which the swallows had their nests.

By the soft reminiscential eye of the cow as she stands at the manger, I know that she

finds in her winter repast the flavor of the loved pasture. The yield of the summer meadows has not all been stored under roof. In the midst of the field where sunburnt Labor conquered with scythe, rake, and fork, is raised a monument of the victory. The great cone of the haystack, rightly viewed, is no less interesting than are the Pyramids themselves. If I mistake not, clear-seeing Morning "opes with haste her lids" to gaze upon this record of human enterprise, lifted from the home plains.

THE FLY-TRAPPER.

In speaking of a fly-trapper rather than of a fly-trap, I do so advisedly; since the object I wish to describe acts from its own volition, possesses rational intelligence, has articulate speech, is capable of handling tools, laughs, — in short, displays all the faculties and traits characteristic of the highest order of animal life. I sometimes think that my friend the fly-trapper, in view of the singular use he serves in the economy of nature, should be set off in a genus by himself; at least, he should be accounted as *sui generis*, in the fullest acceptation of that convenient term. Your first impression regarding him would doubtless be: Here is one laboring under mania; he sees what I cannot see; he grasps in the air at impalpable nothings. You would be much relieved upon discovering that he was catching flies, — an action with him as sane and normal as any harmless idiosyncrasy in your own behavior. With the exception of this peculiar

habit, the fly-trapper is very much like other rural folk with whom we are acquainted: hard-working, rheumatism-plagued, weather-forecasting, one-newspaper-reading, politics-and-theology-debating. The last-named trait is, in his case, rather more strongly developed than is usual, and I have known him, when he had a good listener, to stretch most unthriftily the harvest noon hour, in order that he might fully define "the ground I take," on any given question of a political or religious nature. At such times he is more than ever expert at the practice for which he is so justly distinguished in his own neighborhood. It is indeed wonderful, — the double presence of mind by which he is enabled to carry on argumentative discourse and at the same time attend to the flies. If one of those insects alights on the wall, or the table, anywhere within arm range, it is to the grief of that insect, for the hand of its fate is relentless and unerring. The trapper is also a good marksman, and can take a fly upon the wing as well as in any other situation; apparently, he knows just how long the insect will be in moving from a given point over a given space. Often have I watched the slow, pendulum-like

swing of his arm, bringing up, at length, with fingers shut upon the palm and the unlucky fly. I feel sure that this timely and triumphant gesture serves the speaker as well as would exact logic and verbal force. It is a little strange, however, that the *coup de grace* always falls at the right instant to clinch the argument. I own to a feeling of fascination, while listening to his exposition of Foreknowledge and Foreordination, — the doctrines are so capitally illustrated; the flies figuring as wretched humanity, and the fly-trapper as the dread Predestinator. From the twinkle in his eye, when a successful sweep has been made, and the hapless victim crumpled between thumb and finger, I infer perfectly well the satisfaction a supreme being must take in dooming its abject creatures. I have been assured by those who have excellent opportunities for observation that a little circle of the slain is always to be found upon the floor around the chair occupied by the trapper. There can be no reasonable doubt that, like the great little tailor in the German fairy tale, our hero has killed his "seven at one stroke," though it has never occurred to his modest spirit to vaunt itself on that account. To

compare him with Domitian, who also was an adept in this line, would be to do an injustice to a very humane character; for, when you have excepted the fly-catching propensity, you, as the representative of the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty, can find no stain upon our friend's record.

I cannot say how long the subject of this notice has been in practice (he is now in his sixtieth year), yet probably for more than half a century, from the time when he sat an urchin on the high seat in the district school, he has served in the humble but useful way described. I know how strong is the force of habit, and forbear to laugh when occasionally I see him at his fly-catching after the fly season is past. Is it that his deft hand cannot forget its cunning, or was its dexterity always a vain show, — no real fly in the case? Peradventure here is an instance of *muscæ volitantes* in a mild but incurable form.

RUNNING-WATER NOTES.

I DOUBT if it were a magic bird, as told in the legend, that sang Saint Felix out of the memory of his generation: it is quite as likely that, having traced some river or small stream to its head-waters, he lingered listening to the drop that wears away the stone, and so fell into a half-century reverie. Running water is the only true flowing philosopher, — the smoothest arguer of the perpetual flux and transition of all created things, saying, —

> "All things are as they seem to all,
> And all things flow as a stream."

It is itself a current paradox. It is now here at your feet, gossiping over sand and pebble; it is there, slipping softly around a rushy cape; and it is yonder, just blending with the crisp spray of the last wave on the beach of the lake. Its form and color are but circumstances: the one due to marginal accident and the momentary caprice of the wind; the other, to the complexion of the

sky or to overhanging umbrage. Who can say but that its beginning and its ending are one, — the water-drop in the bosom of the cloud?

We readily consent that the Muses had their birth and rearing in the neighborhood of certain springs and streams. This was a wise provision for their subsequent musical education, since it was intended, no doubt, that they should gather the rudiments from such congenial sources. The Greeks left us no account (as they well might have done) of the technical drill pursued by the nine sisters. However, we may suppose that they wrote off their scores from the fluent dictation of their favorite cascades and streams, and that they scanned, or "sang," all such exercises by the laws of liquid quantity and accent. Perhaps at the same time, the better to measure the feet and mark the cæsural pauses, they danced, as they sang, over the rippled surface of the stream. Nor did the Muses alone love springs and running water, but it would seem that the philharmonic societies of their descendants have had their haunts in like localities: or was it mere chance that Homer should have lived by the river Meles (hence Melesigenes);

that Plato should have had his retirement where

> "Ilissus rolls
> His whispering stream;"

or that Shakespeare, to all time, should be "the Sweet Swan of Avon"?

Consider the vocality and vocabulary of the water: it has its open vowels, its mutes, labials, and sub-vocals, and, if one listen attentively, its little repetend of favorite syllables and alliterations. Like Demosthenes, it knows the use and advantage of pebbles, and has, by this simple experiment, so purified its utterance that nowhere else is Nature's idiom spoken so finely. What a list of onomatopoetic words we have caught from its talkative lips! *Babbling*, *purling*, *murmuring*, *gurgling*, are some of the adjectives borrowed from this vernacular; and some have even heard the "chuckling brooks," — an expression which well describes a certain confidential, *sotto voce* gayety and self-content I have often heard in the parley of the water.

From time to time musical virtuosos and composers, fancying they had discovered the key-note of Niagara, have given us symphonious snatches of its eternal organ harmo-

nies. Some time it may be that all these scattered arias, with many more which have never been published, will be collected and edited as the complete opera of the great cataract! Less ambitious, I have often tried to unravel the melodious vagaries of a summer stream; to classify its sounds, and report their sequence and recurrence. I shall not forget how once, when I was thus occupied, a small bird flew far out on a branch overhanging the water, turned its arch eye on me, then on the dancing notes of my music lesson, and poured out a rippling similitude of song that was plainly meant as an æolian rendition of the theme, or motive, running through the water. I was under double obligation to the little musician, since, in addition to its sweet and clever charity, it put me in possession of the discovery that all of Nature's minstrels are under the same orchestra drill, and capable, at pleasure, of exchanging parts. There was once a naiad (own daughter of celestial Aquarius), who, as often as the rain fell and the eaves-spouts frothed and overran, used to come and dance under a poet's roof. It was a part of her pretty jugglery to imitate the liquid warble of the wood-thrush, bobo-

link, and other pleasing wild-bird notes. No matter how far inland, any one who lives by the "great deep" of a dense wood may hear the roar of the sea when the tide of the wind sweeps in on his coast. Shutting my eyes, I could always readily hear, in the crackling of a brush fire in the garden, the quick and sharp accentuation of rain on the roof.

There are certain English and Old English appellatives of running water which one would fain transplant to local usage on this side of the Atlantic. How suitable that a swift, boiling stream, surcharged with spring rain, should be called a *brawl*, or a fine sunlit thread of a rill embroidering green meadows a *floss*, or any other small, unconsidered stream a *beck!* In New England you shall hear only of the *brook*, and past an indeterminate meridian westward, only of the *creek* (colloquially deformed into "crick"). Indian Creek is a sort of John Smith in the nomenclature of Western streams. Rocky Rivers and Rocky Runs are also frequent enough.

Where streams abound, there, for the most part, will be found sylvan amenity and kindly, cultivated soil. The Nile alone saves

Egypt from being an extension of Sahara. Without some water-power at hand, cities may not be built, nor industries and arts be pushed forward: I should say that no site is hopelessly inland if there runs past it a stream of sufficient current to carry a raft. There is maritime promise in the smallest rivulet: trust it; in time it will bear your wares and commodities to the sea and the highways of commerce. The course of a river, or of a river tributary, suggests a journey of pleasure. Notice how it selects the choicest neighborhoods in its course, the richest fields, the suavest parts of the woods. If it winds about a country village with picturesque white spire and houses hid to the roof in greenery, it seems to have made this deflection out of its own affable and social spirit. The dam and the mill-wheel it understands as a challenge of its speed and agility, and so leaps and dances nimbly over them. All bridges under which it passes it takes as wickets set up in sport.

The motion of water, whether of the ocean billow or of the brook's ripple, is only an endless prolongation or reproduction of the line of beauty. There are no right angles in the profile of the sea-coast or river-margin;

no rectangular pebbles on the beach or in the bed of a stream. The hollow chamber in which the oyster is lodged might have been formed by the union of two waves, magically hardened at the moment of contact; colored without like the ooze of the earth, within like the deep-sea pearl. The fish conforms in shape and symmetry to its living element, and is, in this respect, scarcely more than a wave, or combination of waves. It moves in curves and ripples, in little whirls and eddies, faithfully repeating all the inflections of the water. Even in the least detail it is homogeneous; else, why should the scale of the fish be scalloped rather than serrate? As to color, has it not the vanishing tints of the rainbow? or might it not be thought the thinnest lamina pared away from a pearl, a transparent rose-petal, the finger-nail of Venus?

It is not improbable that the fish furnished the first shipwright with some excellent suggestions about nautical architecture. This shipwright, who was both idealist and utilitarian, had observed the length and slenderness of the fish; its curved sides and tapering extremities, corresponding with the stern and prow of his subsequent invention; also, the fins, which he at first reproduced in rough-

hewn paddles, prototypical of genuine oars. Then, perhaps, a paradoxical notion dawning upon his mind that aerial swimming and aquatic flying were much the same things, he added to his floating craft the wings of the bird as well as the fins of the fish; and soon thereafter began to take the winds into account, to venture out on the broad seas; and finally discovered

> "India and the golden Chersonese,
> And utmost Indian isle, Taprobane."

The scaly appearance of a sheet of water wrinkled by the wind has already been noticed by Thoreau. It needed only a slight suggestion to point out to me the glistening broadside of an old gray dragon sunning himself between the banks. Do dolphins inhabit fresh water? Just under the surface, at the bend of the creek, I see a quivering opalescent or iridescent mass, which I take to be a specimen of this rare fish, unless, indeed, it should prove only a large flat stone, veined and mottled by sunbeams shot through the thin veil of hurrying waters. Equally suggestive are those luminous reflections of ripples cast on a smooth clay bank. Narrow shimmering lines, in constant wavy motion, they seem the web which some spider

is vainly trying to pin to the bank. They are, properly, "netted sunbeams." Water oozing from between two obstructing stones, and slowly spreading out into the current, has the appearance of a tress of some colorless water-grass floating under the surface. I was once pleased to see how a drift of soft brown sand gently sloping to the water's edge, with its reflection directly beneath, presented the perfect figure of a tight-shut clam-shell, — a design peculiarly suited to the locality.

In cooler and deeper retirement, on languid summer afternoons, this flowing philosopher sometimes geometrizes. It is always of circles, — circles intersecting, tangent, or inclusive. A fish darting to the surface affords the central starting-point of a circle whose radius and circumference are incalculable, since the eye fails to detect where it fades into nothingness. Multiplied intersections there may be, but without one curve marring the smooth expansion of another. There are hints of infinity to be gathered from this transient water ring, as well as from the orb of the horizon at sea.

Sometimes I bait the fish, but without rod or hook, and merely to coax them together in

small inquisitive schools, that I may study their behavior and their medium of communication. In this way I enjoy the same opportunities for reverie and speculation as the angler, without indulging in his cruelty or forerelish of the table. I discover that the amusements of the minnows and those of the small birds are similar, with only this difference: that the former, in darting and girding at one another, make their retreats behind stones and under little sand-bars, instead of hiding among the bushes and tilting over thistle tops. It would seem that fish are no less quick in the senses of hearing and seeing than the birds themselves. They start at your shadow thrown over the bank, at your voice, or at the slightest agitation of the water.

> "If you but scantily hold out the hand,
> That very instant not one will remain;
> But turn your eyes, and they are there again."

When they first came up in the spring, I thought they looked unusually lean and shadowy, as though having struggled through a hungry hibernation. They were readily voracious of anything I might throw to them.

There were fish taken under my observation, though not by line or net. I did not

fish, yet I felt warranted in sharing the triumphs of the sport when, for the space of ten minutes or more, I had maintained most cautious silence, while that accomplished angler, the kingfisher, perched on a sightly elm branch over the water, was patiently waiting the chance of an eligible haul. I had, meanwhile, a good opportunity for observing this to me wholly wild and unrelated adventurous bird. Its great head and mobile crest, like a helmet of feathers, its dark-blue glossy coat and white neck-cloth, make it a sufficiently striking individual anywhere. No wonder the kingfisher is specially honored by poetic legend. I must admit that whenever I chanced to see this bird about the stream it was faultless, halcyon weather. I occasionally saw a sandpiper (familiarly, "walk-up-the-creek") hunting a solitary meal along the margin. I had good reason, also, to suspect that even the blackbird now and then helped himself to a *bonne bouche* from the water. Also, did I not see the fish, acting on the "law of talons," come to the surface, and take their prey from the life of the air? This was the fate in store for many a luxurious water-fly skimming about the sunshiny pools like a drop or bead

of animated quicksilver. The insect races born of the water, and leading a hovering existence above it, had always a curious interest for me. What, for instance, can be more piquing to a speculative eye than to watch the ceaseless shiftings or pourings of a swarm of gnats? Is there any rallying point or centre in this filmy system? Apparently there are no odds between the attraction and repulsion governing the movements of the midget nebula, and I could never be satisfied as to whether unanimity or dissent were implied.

There is a large species of mosquito (not the common pest), which I should think might some time have enjoyed religious honors, since, when it drinks, it falls upon its knees! A flight of these gauzy-winged creatures through a shaft of sunlight might conjure up for any fanciful eye the vision of "pert fairies and dapper elves." Of the dragon-fly (which might be the unlaid phantasm of some insect that flourished summers ago), I know of no description so delicately apt as the following: —

> "A wind-born blossom, blown about,
> Drops quiveringly down as though to die;
> Then lifts and wavers on, as if in doubt
> Whether to fan its wings or fly without."

Where is the stream so hunted down by civilization that it cannot afford hospitality to at least one hermit musk-rat? The only water animal extant of the wild fauna that was here in the red man's day, he will eventually have to follow in the oblivious wake of the beaver and otter. It is no small satisfaction that I am occasionally favored with a glimpse of this now rare "oldest inhabitant." Swimming leisurely with the current, and carrying in his mouth a ted of grass for thatching purposes, or a bunch of greens for dinner, he disappears under the bank. So unwieldy are his motions, and so lazily does the water draw after him, that I am half inclined to believe him a pygmean copy of some long extinct river mammoth. Oftener at night I hear him splashing about in the dark and cool stream, safe from discovery and molestation.

Hot, white days of drought there were in the middle of the summer, when, in places, the bed of the creek was as dry as the highway; vacant, except for a ghostly semblance of ripples running above its yellow clay and stones. The fountain of this stream was in the sun and heated air. Walking along the abandoned water-road, I speculated idly

about the fate of the minnows and trout. Had they been able, in season, to take a short cut to the lake or to deeper streams, as is related, in a pretty but apocryphal story, of a species of fish in China, fitted by nature to take short overland journeys?

Much might justly be said in praise of the willow. Its graceful, undulating lines show that it has not in vain been associated with the stream. It practices and poses over its glass as though it hoped some time to become a water nymph. Summer heat cannot impair its fresh and vivid green, — only the sharp edge of the frost can do that; and even when the leaves have fallen away there remains a beautiful anatomy of stems and branches, whose warm brown affords a pleasing relief to November grayness.

At intervals I met the genius of decorative art (a fine, mincing lady) hunting about the weedy margin for botanical patterns suitable for reproduction in æsthetic fabrics and paper hangings. She chose willow catkins, cat-tail flag, the flowers and feathery after-bloom of the clematis, golden-rod, and aster, and showed great anxiety to procure some lily pads and buds that grew in a sluggish cove; but for some reason, unknown to

me as well as to the *genii loci*, she slighted a host of plants as suggestive for ornate designs as any she accepted. She took no notice of the jewel weed (which the stream was not ashamed to reflect, in its velvet, leopard-like magnificence); nor had she any eyes for the roving intricacies of the green-brier and wild-balsam apple. She also left untouched whole families of curious beaked grasses and sedges, with spindles full of flax or silk unwinding to the breeze.

It is nothing strange that the earlier races of men should have believed in loreleis and undines, nixies and kelpies. I cannot say that I have not, myself, had glimpses of all these water-spirits. But the green watered silk in which the lorelei and the undine were dressed was almost indistinguishable in color and texture from the willow's reflection; and the nixie was so often hidden under a crumbling bank and net-work of black roots that I could not be sure whether I caught the gleam of his malicious eye, or whether it was only a fleck of sunshine I saw exploring the watery shade. About the kelpie I am more positive. When the creek was high and wrathful under the scourge of the "line storm," it could have been nothing

else than the kelpie's wild, shaggy mane that I beheld; nothing else that I heard but his hoarse, ill-boding roar.

In this season of the year, I became aware that our stream, like the Nile, had its mysterious floating islands, luxuriant plots set with grass and fern and mint (instead of lotus and papyrus), and lodged upon pieces of drift washed down by the spring floods. All summer securely moored in the shallow water, they were now rent up by the roots, and swept out of all geographical account. Snow-like accumulations of whipped-up foam gathered in lee-side nooks where the current ran less strong, remaining there for many hours together, like some fairy fleet riding at anchor. When the stream had fallen, I often found this accumulation deposited on the sand in a grayish-white drift, dry and volatile as ashes, dispersing at the slightest gust. It suggested that some strange, unwitnessed rite of incineration had been performed there. A beautiful form of aquatic life was lately seen upon our creek. To my eye, it was the most conspicuous object in sight; with its presence it honored and idealized the stream, and made the moment in which it was seen seem worthy of remem-

brance. A figure all curves and grace, as befits whatever lives in the smooth communion of waters; pure white, like a drift of new-fallen snow kept by enchantment from melting, it moved without starting a ripple or leaving the slightest wake, while itself and its mirrored image "floated double." I may have wished it would rise from the water, that I might see the spread of its wings and the manner of its flight, but in this I was not to be gratified. It had the appearance of sleep; and as neither head nor neck could be seen, these were, doubtless, folded under its wing. If it had come as a migrant from distant regions, it was now resting oblivious of its long voyage. Fancy suggested that the poetry of its motion be set to the music of a swan-song. To what island of rushes, or to what bare sandy margin, would it at last come to die, — to dissolve in the sun and the wind, leaving only a pinch of yellow-white dust, which the least breath might scatter away? Was I perhaps mistaken as to the species of this water-fowl? I looked again, and saw that it was one of the brood fledged in storm at the foot of the milldam. Air and water were its parents, and its whole substance

but a drift of foam. A wild, white swan it was (such as no fowler ever snared or shot), sailing solitary and beautiful down the amber-colored stream.

ALONG AN INLAND BEACH.

Of all those who extended and widened the path of Columbus, I have always thought that Vasco Nuñez, "silent upon a peak in Darien," fronting an unknown ocean, was the most favored. I can only wonder at the sordid presence of mind with which he hastened to inform the new-found sea of its vassalage to the crown of Castile. It would seem that in such elemental prospect there could be small suggestion of human supremacy. No configuration of the land, neither the majesty of mountains nor the airy spaciousness of plains, so moves us as does the sea, with its sublime unity and its unresting motion. What is true of the sea, as regards this exalted first impression, may as justly be claimed for any body of water which the vision is unable to span, — may be claimed for Erie, which, as well as its companion Great Lakes, fully deserves to be called a "fresh-water sea." For the hundredth time beholding it, I feel the thrill

of discovery, and drink in the refreshing prospect as with thirsty Old World eyes. "Who poured all that water out there?" a child's question on first seeing the Lake, best embodies the primitive wonderment and pleasure which the sight still retains for me. I am not chagrined as I reflect that, of this inland water system, this Broad River traveling under many aliases, Erie is reckoned the shallowest: if its depth were greater, would it not hinder the present experiment? It is already deeper than my sounding-line is long.

I fall on paradox in saying that ordinarily I am not within sight of the Lake, though quite constantly residing upon one of its beaches. It is proper to state that this beach is at present four good miles from highest water-mark; that at a very early period it was abandoned by the Lake; was dry land, clothed with sward and forest, a very long time before any red settlement, to say nothing of the white, was established hereabouts. A great stone bowl or basin the master mechanic Glacier originally scooped out to hold this remnant of the ancient continental sea. Its successive shrinkings are plainly marked on the sides of the bowl in

continuous lines of *relievo*, which, according as they are slight or bold, the geologist terms ridges or terraces. That these are the Lake's old beaches is now generally accepted. That this region was once swept by the waves is evident from the frequency of sand and gravel beds and other earthy deposits, which may be reckoned the impedimenta dropped and left behind in the Retreat of Erie's Ten Thousand. East and west roads follow the ridges; from which at various points the traveler most fitly sights the far-retired water.

In approaching the Lake, long before the blue ribbon that binds the northern horizon appears above the land verge, you should know by the quick, springing breeze that you are nearing some great gathering of waters. You should infer who holds sway yonder by that three-forked sceptre thrust sharply up against the sky, — though it is possible that you may see nothing but the crabbed form of a tall dead tree: from long familiarity I have learned its true purport. Observe how the landscape avails itself of the Lake as a favorable foil. This field of ripe wheat, — how red is its gold when displayed against the azure distance! Never

looked Indian corn more beautiful than here, floating its green blades on the wind, and holding whispered parley with the water. If we walk along, having this field between us and the Lake, we shall still catch glimpses of its heavenly face down all the vistas formed by the rows. Thus, we play hide and seek a while before coming face to face with our friend.

The characteristic summer coloring of the Lake is, for some distance out, a tawny white or pale lava tint; midway, green with slashes of deep purple, which one might fancy to be narrow rifts opening into a profounder, sunless deep; beyond, the pure ultramarine of farthest eye-range, in which the ridging of the waves becomes indistinguishable. The clarity and the swift interchange of these purples and greens have often reminded me of the same colors sporting in a particularly choice soap-bubble. Sometimes I look, and behold! a multiform animate jewel, liquid sapphire and emerald, cut in a hundred transient facets, over which seethes and sparkles a deflagrating diamond. The term "glassy sea" should be in good acceptation. This faithful looking-glass, this old friend of the sky, gives instant

warning of every flaw or beauty-spot of a passing cloud seen upon its face. The Lake reflects itself, also, and in this wise: the white foam vertex of each wave is mirrored in the porcelain blue of the concave floor between it and the preceding wave. The prevailing summer wind is from the west; hence, oftenest from that quarter, as from illimitable watery pampas or Tartary plains, comes the stampede of wild white horses. Fancy makes her choice, and throws a lasso, determined to bring a steed to shore; but the protean creature so changes, each instant raising a new head and tossing mane, that there is no singling it out from the common drove, no telling when it reaches the beach.

It is not a difficult matter, any morning, to take the Lake napping (for it holds no arrogant views on the subject of early rising). At sunrise, its only sound is the soft lapping of the ripples along the sand, a sweet and careless lip-service. One would say that the kildeer's sharp wing left a distinct mark upon the surface. As the bird rises higher, its shadow, slim and elongated in the water, seems to be diving, — a shadowy bird striking at shadowy fish. The

interval between the faint swells has the gloss and smoothness of the mill-stream slipping over the edge of the dam. While in this slumberous condition, the Lake well merits the characterization of The Big Pond, given it by one who is frequently with me upon the beach.

> "Often 't is in such gentle temper found
> That scarcely will the very smallest shell
> Be moved for days from where it some time fell
> When last the winds of heaven were unbound."

At evening, when the Lake breeze is dropping off to sleep, this wide spread of misty blue looks not unlike a fine lawny curtain, or tent-cloth, tacked at the horizon, free at the shore, and here and there lifted by a light wind underneath. At such time, to cast in a pebble were, seemingly, at the risk of making an irreparable rent in an exquisite fabric. Where, inland, does the day so graciously take leave? Not that the color pageant is here especially remarkable, but that the water has the effect of a supplemental heaven, repeating and emphasizing the tenderness and beauty of the evening sky. On these two canvases, how many pictures, both lovely and grotesque, have been painted! How often the trail of crimson

light over a moderately rough surface showed me the outline of a monstrous lake-serpent, whose head was at the down-going of the sun, and whose tail reached to the oozy sand at my feet, — that tail, sure to writhe till the very last beam had departed! Once watching the sun sink through a light mist, I saw what appeared a globe slowly filling with water, as though the Lake had risen in it by force of capillary attraction. At another time, a strip of dark cloud, lying across the sun, threw up the profile of a tropical island, palm grove, coral reef, and lagoon: a graven land of the sun, with the golden disk for a sunset background. One memorable evening there was a rainbow, of which one base rested upon the Lake. The seven-hued seal laid upon that spot hinted that the traditional treasure coffer of the heavenly arc had been sunk in the water for greater security. Far away from land, might not a rainbow, with its shadow upon the waves, vaguely indicate a prismatic circle, through which a sailing ship might seem to pass to unimagined regions of romance?

If you have time to kill, try this chloroforming process: Sit on the beach, or the turfy bank above, and watch the passing of

ships. Hours will have elapsed before the sail, which dawned red with the sunrise, will have traversed the rim of this liquid crescent and disappeared at its western tip. Often a steamer stands in so near that with the naked eye you can distinguish the figures of the crew and their movements. Or you see the clue which binds the toilsome, fuming steam-tug with its listless followers. In bright, still weather, whatever goes over the deep is unwontedly etherealized. That distant ship, with motionless sunny sails, might be an angel galaxy, — wings drawn together above some happy spirit of mortal ripe for translation.

For you or me, the beach is a place of idleness, but for another it is a field of busiest enterprise. Might we not have more confidential relations with the Lake, more official knowledge, if we tried to get our living therefrom? The sand-piper has this advantage over us. He runs like a fly along the wet sand, his line of travel a series of scallops bounded by the coming and receding of the waves. Sometimes, "for fun," he lets the water overtake and wash around his slender legs. He runs well, but cannot maintain a graceful standing position; for

he seems to have the centre of gravity misplaced, always nodding and swaying (tip-up, teeter), as though shaken by the wind, or troubled with a St. Vitus's dance. He frequently visits inland, up the marsh stream, when, by his phantomy, noiseless flight as well as by his colors, mixed black, white, and brown, I am put in mind of the dragon-fly. Should we not know something worth knowing of the Lake if we fished from its waters — not with line or seine, as the manner of some is, but as the eagle! That bird's flight! it is subdued exaltation; steady sails, with the least use of the oars; no petty movement, nothing for gymnastic display. This aquiline old inhabitant — such surprise to me as the roc to Sinbad — has his habitation in a high tree-top overlooking the water; a feudal castle, no doubt, in eagle annals.

By contrast with the sound and motion of the waves, the land sinks to inanition before our eyes. It no longer looks to be *terra firma*, but an illusory coast, a painted piece of summer mirage. The breeze may be bending the grain and swaying forest branches, but no report is brought to our ears; the ineffectual soughing is lost in the manifold

noise of waters. A little distance back in the fields or woods, and all is changed: the land wakes; the Lake is a dream; its voice comes soothingly, like the pleasant sound of a storm gone by. From the bank, listening in the direction of a certain shallow bay, I can always hear a faint canorous vibration, distinct from the hollow murmur of the waves. What wonder if I come to think that the "singing sands" are to be found not so very far away? Or if I credit the sweet air to a shoal of dolphin, lying in the hazy sunlight and humming over some old Arion melody, may I not be pardoned the vagary? The succession of breaking waves is an endless verse, yet not without the ictus and cæsural pause; for all waves do not beat with like emphasis, and the interval varies. Listening to the pulses of any great water, the final impression gained is not of inconstancy, but of changelessness throughout all change. When was it otherwise than now? When were these waves not coursing their way to the shore, or when shall they cease coming? If any one understands the anatomy of the melancholy which overtakes us here, it is not I. After the novelty has worn off, there is something haunting and burden-

some in this cry of the waves. I cannot think it morbidity that opens this sombre vein; for the most healthful souls have not remained unaffected. Some time or other, every walker on the beach has heard the "eternal note of sadness;" and

> "Sophocles long ago
> Heard it on the Ægean."

In this melancholy, hearing is reinforced by sight: we see the wave approach and break upon the shore; see it spent and refluent, lost in the vast unindividual body. It is no comforting parable we hear spoken upon the beach. The hurl and headiness of our endeavors are mocked at, apparently. Are we such broken and refluent waves along the shore of the eternities?

It is doubtless well known that the level of the Lake is not uniform from year to year, or even from season to season. Early emigrants from Buffalo to Cleveland were favored somewhat as were the ancient Israelites: the water was unusually low, permitting them to travel by the beach, with the advantage of a free macadamized road. From the record of observations made at intervals during the present century, it appears that the Lake was at its lowest level

in 1819, at its highest in 1838, — the difference in level amounting to six feet, eight inches. The greatest inconstancy noted as occurring between seasons is two feet, though the average difference is considerably less. The Lake attains its greatest annual height during the month of June, its volume having been steadily increased by the discharge of its tributaries, swollen with the spring rains. Some of Erie's old neighbors — who live next door, and might be thought to be best acquainted with his incomings and outgoings, who have a notched stick in their memories — maintain that seven years, alternately, see the Lake at its minimum and maximum height. Seven is a prepotent number. Seven is climacteric: everybody knows that within this period the human system undergoes a complete change. Possibly, the Lake's being is governed by a similar law. While these secular and annual variations are accounted for with little difficulty, there is another class of oscillations which offers a perennial problem to the men of science as well as to the old neighbors. I speak of the remarkable changes of level, the rapid advances and recessions of the water, for which apparently the wind cannot

be held to account. These inconstancies have suggested to some the hypothesis of a lake-tide, however careless and indefinite in keeping its appointments. But the tide theory, it has reasonably been objected, does not elucidate that prime mystery of the Great Lakes, — the so-called "tidal wave." By how much is Erie wilder and freer than ocean itself! Unlike the servile sea, it observes no stated periods of ebb and flood, performs no dances up the beach under the nod and beck of the moon; but when it listeth (not frequently, for peace and law-abidingness are its normal mood), it throws up a great billow, like, but mightier than, that with which Scamander signaled his brother river. Out of a calm lake, without other warning than a sudden shifting of the gentle breeze and a low, thundery rumbling, rises a moving ridge of water, ten, fifteen, or even twenty feet in height. It hurls itself upon the shore, very sea-like and outrageous in its action; rushing over piers, snapping the hawsers of vessels at dock, and dashing up the mouths of its astonished tributaries. Almost immediately it retires, sometimes to be followed by one or two minor surges; after which all is tranquil as before, and the

gentle breeze epiloguizes, having resumed its former post. The most striking instances of these tidal waves occurred in 1830, 1845, and the last as late as 1882. The theory now generally received is that "unequal atmospheric pressure" is the causal force in these strange agitations of the water. There are those who, in the tidal wave of the last year, saw an effort made by the Lake to swallow a cyclone. This it most certainly achieved, if there was any cyclone in the case, since no violence of wind was felt upon the land. Another theory, until now privately entertained, is, that these great waves are the Lake's sudden, wrathy resolutions to strike once more for its ancient beaches, and sink the innovating land forever. If that be the intention, the outcome, I grant, is wholly insignificant. Yet it may be that Erie will become the great real-estate owner, land speculator and devourer, hereabouts. The tidal wave may be nothing to the point, but this slow, patient erosion under the banks, very perceptible in its effects after the lapse of a generation, — does it count for nothing? The places where the gnawing is most furious may be protected by "cribs" (rectangular framework of heavy timbers

ballasted with stones); but the security thus afforded is only temporary. The road used by the early inhabitants of the shore is not now practicable: it is indeed a lost road, lying either in air or upon the water beneath; and many a homestead and garden have slid off into the bosom of the Lake. Of the last to go some vestiges yet remain: tufts of dooryard shrubs and plants, lilac bushes, or a gay knot of corn lilies flaunting light farewell before disappearing over the crumbling verge. As we walk along the ragged bank, we might sketch the wasted landscape upon the airy void, filling it in with visionary lines, like the faint dotted lines of hypothesis in a geometric diagram. Whether the Lake henceforth will advance or retreat, who can tell? Once — so runs a fairy tale of science — this Erie communicated with La Belle Rivière, Ohio the Beautiful (but that was long before the stormy Niagara path had been beaten out); if at some time it should decide to renew its southern acquaintance, would it be able to find its way through the old "water gaps," which have been choked up with drift during unknown cycles?

From its softening influence upon the cli-

mate, the Lake might be characterized as an inland gulf-stream. In summer it is a well-spring of grateful coolness; a constant breeze by day flowing landward, replaced at night by a breeze from the land. In the winter its effect is — to compare great things to small — like that of the tub of water set in the cellar to take the edge off the frost. At this season, the mercury stands several degrees higher in shore thermometers than in those some miles inland. If the ice, with which the Lake parts so slowly, churning back and forth between its shores, retards the spring, the disadvantage is fully atoned for in the prolonged fine weather of autumn. One might venture to set up the claim that Indian Summer is here seen at its brightest and best. Such is the quiet geniality beaming in the face of this water during the fall months that I half expect to see "birds of calm" brooding upon its surface, their inviolable nests placed somewhere under the dry, warm bank.

To have come a long journey, to have arrived within sight of home, and then to suffer detention, — this is what has happened to our creek of many windings. Here it halts, scarcely two rods from the tossing

spray, a bar of sand across its mouth. It has not force enough to overcome the difficulty, and so it settles back in sleek, sunshiny contentment, toying with Nymphæa and Nuphar; beloved of the pickerel-weed, the arrow-head, and the floating utricularia. It settles back into a dense field of sedge and cat-tail, over whose soldierly lances the rosy oriflamme of the marsh-mallow holds sway. Late in the summer noisy flocks of blackbirds assemble here. Like an entertainment planned by a wizard are the two prospects: on one hand the hurrying "white caps" and shouting waves; on the other, the still indifference of the halted stream.

How shall we regard this considerable piece of unfenced common, with the unclaimed properties we may chance to find upon it? If Neptune write us a letter in substantial sort, shall it be lawful for any to intercept the contents? Having consigned to us certain flotsam and jetsam, thus writes Neptune: "That which I send you, scruple not to accept; it has been so long in my possession that all previous right and title thereto are annulled." The dwellers on any coast are always receiving such letters from the blue-haired autocrat; and it is scarcely to

be wondered at if they accept his gifts and assurances without questioning his authority. It would seem that a sort of wrecking epidemic is bred from every large body of water, whether salt or fresh. I confess to a feeling of expectancy, when on the beach, that the Lake will bring me something, although I do not imagine it will be in any solid merchantable shape, or that you would care to dispute the prize, or that the owner would think it worth while to redeem the property by paying me salvage. I do not go so far as do some, who trustingly regard the Lake as a kind of sub-Providence acting in their behalf. In winter, the rescue of lumber sent adrift by the fall freshets receives considerable attention along shore, and is carried on at whatever risk of frozen extremities or rheumatic retribution. The wrecking laws are sometimes sharply disputed. Doubtless, there is more need of stringency now than formerly, when the lumber traffic was less extensive. The waves work in the interest of the shore, yet they were not always to be depended upon. There was the case of the old-time inhabitant, — faithful patroller of the beach in the early mornings after nights of storm: to one who

asked him why he had not "built on an addition," he replied that he had intended to do so; but, somehow, the Lake had n't been kind to him that year, — had not furnished the requisite timbers. There was also a good dame to whom Neptune sent a quilt; a not incomprehensible present, when we reflect that it must have seen service upon the "cradle of the deep." Many years ago, a vessel making a last voyage for the season was kept out of port, and finally hemmed in by the fast-forming ice; her captain and crew going ashore in Canada. Though she was a long distance out, the people of the southern coast spied her, and proceeded over the solid ice to visit her. She carried a miscellaneous cargo of unusual value. Firmly held in abeyance, she was in no immediate danger; but the landsmen did not see the situation in this light, — on the contrary, resolving to give the benefit of their wrecking services. Accordingly they lightened the ship as fast as possible, each taking what seemed to him the most valuable. Silks, velvets, and broadcloths were the chief objects of rescue, though I have heard that one man selected a sheaf of umbrellas (that article which on all occasions invites sequestration), while another

devoted himself to the safe transportation of an "elegant family Bible," the character of the freight perhaps giving a religious color to the proceeding. My chronicler records that, while engaged in this salvation of property, the participants sustained life by making free use of the ship's provisions. On their return journey, the ice parting compelled some to remain out over night, exposed to very bitter cold; others were extremely glad to reach shore empty-handed, having consigned their booty to the Lake, which was afterwards seen flaunting in silks and velvets. The impromptu colporteur was of all the company most unfortunate; both his feet having been frozen in their evangelical progress, and permanent lameness resulting. He is reported to have made the following plaintive statement of his case: "Always went in the very best society, before I got my feet froze; but now it 's different, and I 'm sure I don't see why." The owners of the vessel subsequently brought suit against these misguided wreckers, who constantly maintained that their sole purpose in the expedition had been to *save* property. The moral of this coastwise episode is to be found in the fact that the actors were pos-

sessed of the average probity, or, at least, while on land would never have committed the smallest larceny. Nothing but the theory of a wrecking epidemic can account for their deflection from the right line of conduct. A few winters since, a schooner with iron ore from the upper lakes foundered off our coast. The water washing upon the ore acquired for some distance a dark red flush, — as though a mighty libation of wine had been offered. Of this wreck a farmer on the shore preserves a relic most absurdly framed, "Jane Bell" (the name of the sunken vessel) now serving as a legend over his barn door. It strikes me he ought not to complain if, having thus dedicated his property to the nautical powers, he should some morning find it had deserted its site, and gone a-sailing, from barn converted into ark.

Tame as this shore appears, it has nevertheless received its tragic depositions from the waves. Voyagers, whose bearings were forever lost, have lain on its pebble-strewn beach; it has even happened to them to be manacled with ice, — as though their estate were not already cold and sure enough. In my wrecking experience, such as it has been, nothing ever came more serviceable than the

finding of a piece of ship timber, half sunken in the sand, but still displaying the horse-shoe which had been nailed upon it, — for luck! What luck had they met with, who had so striven to procure the good-will of fate? Surely, here was the most effective silent sermon ever preached against the use of charms and phylacteries!

If we closely observe the sand left bare by the receding wave, we shall see occasional perforations, from which the escaping air drives a little jet of water, — minute pattern of a geyser. Such perforations are probably caused by the sinking of fine gravel. If we have no business more pressing, it may be worth our while to make an inventory of the various articles that lie on this curiosity shelf, the beach. There is, first, the driftwood: judging from the bone-like shape and whiteness of the ligneous fragments with which the Lake strews its margins, we might suppose it to have a taste for palæontology. More than one fossil-resembling model of nameless ancient beast, as well as the originals of all the nondescripts in heraldry, shall we rescue from the sand. It would be curiously interesting to follow the varying fortunes of yonder tree, which, lately uprooted

by the wind, lies prone upon the water, its leafage unconscious of destiny, still being nourished with sap; how long will it take the great planer and turner to convert this tree into effects as fantastic as those we have noted in the drift? This artificer, the Lake, abhors angles, and strives to present the line of beauty in whatever it turns out of its laboratory. Here, among those least bowlders, crystalline pebbles from the far north, is a lump of coal, worn to an oval contour, well polished, and hinting of cousinship with the diamond. Here, beside the abundant periwinkle, are thin flakes of clam-shell, iridescent and beautiful; trinkets made from the spines of fish; the horny gauntlets of the crab; a dragon-fly; the blue and bronze plates of large beetles not seen inland; and the fluttering, chaffy shells of the "Canada soldiers," short-lived myrmidons of the shore. And here is a tithe of last year's hickory and butternut mast; the burs of various rough marsh plants; a lock of a lake-maid's hair (or is it only a wisp of blanched rootlets from some distant stream side?); an ear of corn, half buried, its kernels, with mustard-seed faith, pushing up green blades through the lifeless, unstable sands. Now and then you

see the feather of a gull or other water-haunting bird — a plume in your cap if you find the quill of an eagle! I have just picked up an arrow-head, which I would fain believe has lain here ever since an Indian hunter shot it at a stag that had come down to drink at sunrise. Heaven saved the mark and frustrated the hunter; for which I cannot be sorry. This missile may have been carved out at the arrow-head armory, the site of which a farmer thinks he has found in one of his fields. This is a piece of rising ground, where, before successive plowings had entirely changed the surface, the spring yield of flints was unusually large. As most of these were imperfect, and mixed with a great proportion of shapeless chippings, they were supposed to be waste and rejected material, such as always accumulates around a workman's bench. Here, then, in the days that have no historian, sat a swarthy Mulciber, plying his trade with the clumsiest tools, either alone, or the centre of a group of idle braves and story-telling ancients. More verifiable is the tradition of an aged and solitary Indian, living at some distance back in the forest; a red man of destiny, by his tribe doomed to perpetual exile for some capital offense, of which he had been found guilty. Of the

great nation whose name is borne by this water (Lake Erie, Wildcat Lake!) only the meagrest account has been transmitted. The Eries were gone long enough before this region owned the touch of civilization.

We frequently speak of the Lake as "frozen over," but this is a mistake; there is always a central channel of free water. The glassy quay that builds out from shore remains unchanged the entire winter, but the ice bordering that open mid-stream is greatly subject to the pleasure of the wind, — sometimes driven southward, sometimes far to the north; in the latter case, the dark line of moving waters is visible from our coast. Frozen, the Lake seems possessed of a still but strenuous power, as though after the habit of water on a cold winter night it might crack the great bowl in which it was left standing. The arrested waves are raised against the shore as if in act to strike: the blow will never be dealt; they will not lower all at once, but, as the winter relaxes, the sun will turn away their wrath and they will go down from the shore assuaged. It is no miracle to walk the waves, when the waves are firm as marble; yet in so doing you feel a strong sense of novelty. Along their projecting edges, rows of icicles, like the stalac-

tite trimmings of a cave, are formed. In the thawing weather of early spring, it is rather strange and decidedly pleasing to hear the tinkling fall of the little streams that are crannying the ice. For the moment you might think it a place of rocks abounding in springs, being helped to that fancy by the masses of frozen gravel as well as by the musical sounds from the melting ice. The charm to the ear is in the contrast drawn between this slender melody and the remembered din of the waves. What we hear is the old Lake waking up with infantine prattle and prettiness, not yet alive with the consciousness of power.

I am aware that the Lake is not the ocean: its waves are shorter, running not so high; and though it is occasionally heard to boom, it has not the deep, oracular voice of the sea. Its beach is not the spacious beach of ocean, yet, — and I note the fact with interest, — its sands support the sea-rocket and the beach-pea, plants that will thrive under kisses more pungent than those of fresh-water spray. When I am praising the Lake, I should not forget that, after tarrying long upon its shore, I become conscious of a serious lack in its nature: can it be *salt* that is wanting?

A SUMMER HOLINIGHT.

"O lente lente currite noctis equi!"

We are accustomed to speak of darkness as negation, of the night as a usurper; but a fair arbitration never yet gave the award of priority to day. Our mortality deals with the day; our immortality with the night. Why not try to regain some of the privileges of citizenship in this oldest of Saturnian kingdoms? Night will be friendly to thee: ask a boon. There is a flavor of novelty in the idea of holding a vigil which shall be neither penitential nor scientific, nor yet in the nature of a municipal watch or military bivouac — a vigil to spy out the mysterious ways of the Night, to listen, as an eavesdropper, at the door of her council-chamber. I recall with pleasure certain nights of the past summer spent in this unsecular enterprise.

The day springs; so also does the night. Our common expression, nightfall, is an inversion of the truth. The chalice of the

evening air has its marked degrees showing the gradual rise of the shadow. Already the forest hedge of the horizon is submerged; the low-lying strata of sunset vapors are changed to the color of a smouldering ember; but directly overhead there is still a region of unmingled daylight — fluid sapphire with some few dissolving pearls of floating cloud. Through this translucent element the latest lingering birds take their flight, dropping down into some convenient tree when finally overtaken by dusk. Innumerable happy hints and allusions occur to the imagination during the long reign of the summer twilight. Given a bright sunset field to work upon, what heraldic conceits, what compositions of the Doré order, can be traced in the old Earth's irregular profile! Every evening I observe yonder, on the brow of the hill, a devout Benedictine leaning on his staff, repeating what *aves* and *pater-nosters* I know not. Whoever intrudes upon the ghostly father's orisons discovers for his pains only the torso of an old tree in a hood and capote of ivy. Along the hill-slope a hobbledehoy dance of gnarled saplings is in progress. The feathery crowns of the dandelion rising above

the cropped grass of the pasture figure, in this crepuscular comedy, as a service of astral lamps set to light the midsummer-night frolics of the little people. They have also the small, uncertain taper of the firefly. This taper, as though held in the invisible hand of some spirit of the underwood, goes searching along the grass, up through the trees, and now into the sky, as if piqued to discover what relationship the stars bear to its own phosphorescent atom. Nature is tender of fireflies, and only on fit nights allows them to be on parade. If the air has any asperity about it, not a firefly is to be seen.

In the nights bordering on the summer solstice, the boundaries of twilight are not easily defined. There is always a faint flush, or aurora, above the northern horizon, and by a little past two o'clock there is a very perceptible hint of dawn. It might be said that the after-glow of yesterday mingles with the "forlorn hope" of to-morrow. This scarcely intermittent twilight serves to remind us of our distance from the equator, and suggests, too, that our next neighbor under the Pole Star is the Land of the Midnight Sun. Those who have lived in trop-

ical countries say that the gloom, or opacity, there observable in the northern heavens often gave them a strange feeling of isolation and homesickness.

Who, though never so watchful, could see the appearing of a star? Without the least premonitory sparkle, a "new planet swims into his ken," but the exact instant of discovery can never be gauged. Once seen, it seems to have been shining from eternity. Equally elusive is the vanishment of a star. It would seem an easy task to mark when that pale fluttering mote, smitten with apprehension of the day-god, shall succumb before his beams; yet to one that has not tried the experiment, it is almost incredible how long the star may be discerned — even after the sun has risen, if his brightness be partially veiled by clouds. In thus watching a diminishing star, the eye seems as though looking through a dense stream at a precious stone reposing upon the stream's bed. There are instants of visual relaxation when the star appears overswept by a wave of light, but is again recovered to the sight. Finally no eyebeam has power to draw it up from the ether gulf; it was there, it is gone; we cannot claim that we

saw its farewell twinkle. After such a vigil, however, we possess a kind of new experimental faith, that the stars are above us all day, seeing though unseen. 'T is as though witnessing the death of some beloved person should but the more impress us with belief in the spirit's deathlessness. Perhaps early man read a first lesson in immortality from the stars. Observing that, although they were blotted out by day, night returned them to their places, and that a familiar constellation, for a season lost to the early evening, might be found in the morning sky, — observing perpetuity subtending all changes, he well might have inferred a likeness between the fate of the heavenly lights and that of the "soul that rises with us, our life's star." Have the stars aught to do with human destiny? We have seen them consenting, denying, admonitory, reminiscent, prophetic. They so lend themselves to any vagary in the mind of the gazer, that no certain conclusion can be drawn as to their independent "influence." "They fought from heaven, the stars in their courses fought against Sisera," sung the Israelitish prophetess. But hearken what Jessica learned from her lover's lips on a summer night: —

"There 's not the smallest orb which thou behold'st,
But in his motion like an angel sings,
Still quiring to the young-eyed cherubins."

Yonder planet, "the beauty crest of summer weather," seems bright and near enough, if but hung at the proper angle, to reflect the Earth's image upon its disk. Then should the Earth know that she was beloved, seeing herself in miniature within that bright planetary eye! There are poets' stars, haunts and retirements among the constellations, that have almost an historical fame. One such haunt is Ariadne's Crown. In the old drama, the hero, expecting immediate execution at the hand of the tyrant, takes this leave of his wife: —

"My Dorigen,
Yonder, above, 'bout Ariadne's Crown,
My spirit shall hover for thee."

Nearly in the zenith at twilight is a bright star dear for its association with home, as in these lines: —

"Arcturus sees what I cannot,
The country town where I was born,
The light within my mother's cot,
The field that lately waved with corn."

By night the concavity of the sky is much more pronounced than by day. The heavens are spread above us as a vast dome,

gallery on gallery, transept and arch, and recesses for the choirs of silence, sunk in the mysterious mid-distances of the firmament. It is no wonder the fanciful speak of the windows of heaven. So many crystalline openings in the dark wall, through which stream showers of radiance as from the reservoir or fountain-head of all light! At first the celestial perspective appears overcrowded, star jostles star, beams are interknit and involved in a sort of metropolitan maze. Gradually the eye recovers from its perplexity, and becomes a measurer of interstellar space, a resolver of nebulæ, a connoisseur of infinitudes; nor are delicate details unobserved, such as the two small flickering stars in the face of Taurus, that seem engaged in a teasing, butterfly play. Thank Heaven the stars never grow less. The hills of our childhood have shrunk to hillocks, the river has narrowed between its banks, the sea is no longer a type of infinity since we have crossed it, — all things on earth diminish as the eye grows old in its regard. Not so the stars. If they sometime spoke to the youth, they companion age. Science and hard fact can never reduce them. Waning faith rekindles, imagi-

nation mends its broken fortunes, at this source. Any allusion to the stars, whether it be on printed page or in the text of the orator, wakens a sense of freedom and sublimity. The sun is a despotism, the stars are a republic, of light: it is better to live under a republic than under a despotism. Any nation that claims to enjoy their tutelary regard, and borrows from them its emblem, has an heroic task to make good its boast of liberty.

The moon should be tried for witchcraft, as possibly she has been at some crazy assize of mediæval judicature. That she has undergone an *auto da fe*, — has been burned for her necromancies, — has not lessened her wizard potentiality. The present night is as full of her enchantments as when Medea gathered the herbs "that did renew old Æson." What blame to the husbandman, if, suspecting that there is "something in the moon," he should plant, or should withhold his hand, according to her instructions?

These slopes were never pastured by our flocks,
Yon forests ne'er shook out their thick black locks
To breezes of the day, but silent stand,
The loyal outpost of enchanted land.
Lo, this is Night's strange realm! All things are strange,

A sorceress in heaven hath wrought the change.
Her face doth front the sun; the light she stored
In long-lapsed ages on this eve is poured.
Therefore the world looks shadowy and old,
A silver dew o'erlays the grain-sheaves' gold,
The glow of fruited hills she hath replaced
With soft oblivious sheen; in the pale waste
Of southern sky she sits alone, supreme,
Pours draughts for sleep, and sends the elfin dream.
If she be arbitress of ocean's tide,
Shall not the meadow water smoother glide,
And feel her orbèd mastery no less? —
It smoother glides and laps the floating cress.

But if we admit a tidal impulse in the world of waters, why not admit as well that the clod feels a similar drawing moonward? There is a tremulous agitation of the leaves, a wilder rumor in the air, when late in the night the rim of the moon gleams above the dark horizon, the east blushing faintly ere her rising.

"O Moon! the oldest shades 'mong oldest trees
Feel palpitations when thou lookest in:
O Moon! old boughs lisp forth a holier din,
The while they feel thine airy fellowship.
Thou dost bless everywhere with silver lip,
Kissing dead things to life."

I do not find the night as devoid of color as is frequently represented; nor will we have our nocturne a monochromatic piece. "Brown" is the adjective most commonly

pressed into service by the old-time poets to characterize the complexion of the night. But the night is not brown; at least, we recognize the umber medium, and looking through and beyond it receive from all objects distinct notice of their local daylight color — Nature still plainly wearing the green mantle. A difference, however, is to be noted in the unlike effects of moonlight on various leaf surfaces. The foliage of the maple and the elm shows little definition of masses, seeming rather to absorb than to radiate the light, while that of the peach and the pear-tree presents a fine polished surface and outline. The leaves of the poplar, stirred by a breath imperceptible elsewhere, look like innumerable small, oval mirrors, constantly shifting to reflect at all angles the lunar majesty. The corn-field seems the repository of all the scythes and sickles that have reaped the summer meadows, — lodged here to be reannealed in moonbeams and whetted into new keenness. The moon is shorn of half her pageantry on the earth if the dew is not there to coöperate. Is there, or do we only fancy it, an iridescence arising from their union? I am loth to tread on the grass, lest I should destroy the starry

system suspended on its blades. The wagon tracks and hoof-prints in the road shine as though they had been traced by a style or pencil dipped in moonlight? and what is the true color of moonlight? not silver, not golden, but something between the two, — argent-aureate.

At night the air carries a heavier freight of woody and vegetable odors than during the hours of sunlight; the breeze advises us of a new Orient, or Spice Islands, discovered in the familiar latitude of our fields, bringing the scent of blossoming clover and grain. Brushing along some tangled border, we guess "in embalmed darkness" that the milkweed is in bloom, though its perfume bears a reminder of spring and the hyacinth. Here also is the evening primrose, whose flower ought to be as dear to the night as the daisy is to the day; and why should there not be a night's-eye on the floral records?

Nor is the night as silent as it is commonly reported, unless it be so accepted on the principle that where there is no ear there is no sound. Even then, one wakeful exception in a universe of sleepers ought to be sufficient to give acoustic character to

the nocturnal void. I found the night, like the cup of Comus, "mixed with many murmurs." First, and the nearest at hand, the lively orchestration of the crickets (the later summer adds the fife of a grasshopper and the castanets of the katydid); then, in the distance, the regular, sonorous, or snoring antiphonies of the frogs at different points along the winding course of the creek. It would not surprise me to learn that these night musicians are systematically governed by the baton and metronome, so well do they keep time in the perplexing fugue movement which they are performing. That note from the thicket is the whip-poor-will's. What in all the vocalities of Nature is there to compare with this voice of the cool and the dusk, this cloistered melodist, who was never yet heard in the profane courts of Day? It is "most musical, most melancholy," — a not unworthy rival of the English nightingale. Yet close by the whip-poor-will's covert one hears what might be called the mechanical process of his song — a harsh, unlubricated whir, or rattle, which suggests a laryngean ailment of some sort, as, in the same way, the wild dove's note, heard close by, suggests asthmatic breathing. As to

the beetle, though I am not quite sure of having heard his "small but sullen horn," I shall not omit him from the category of nocturnal noise-makers. Like the clumsy, heavy-mailed hoplite that he is, he "sounds as he falls," and crackles in the grass in his efforts to right himself. Under the eaves the boring bee still carries on its carpentry. Rarely a half hour passes that some bird does not sing in its sleep; the swallows twitter in their sooty chimney corner; the robin at intervals declares for morning with a loud vivacious whistle, and the wood pewee sends a long note of inquiry. Greece would have told a tragic tale of the killdeer and its haunting, quavering cry uttered on the wing, — for this bird is always abroad in bright moonlight. The falling of an apple in the orchard seems to emphasize the law of gravitation. I notice that any sound of the human voice, any unwonted noise, dropped in the deep well of nightly quiet, produces a rapidly widening circle of murmurous responses and expostulations. From the poultry-yard the night-watch there blows a drowsy *mot*, which is repeated successively by all the chanticleers of the neighborhood; the cow lows discontentedly from her Para-

dise of June pasturage; and even the crickets grow more strident. From which I infer that the night keeps a police force in her pay. How do I know what invisible patrols supplement this audible and stationary picket-guard? There are fitful stirrings of the leaves, — a sighing as of *aura veni*, — a sudden rustling, as of a jealous hidden Procris. Beyond all accountable sounds there is always the shadow of a sound, — "neither here nor there," — a sound which may be the stir of atmospheric particles, or the hum of noonday activities at the capital of Cathay, or a reminiscence in air of planetary music, or the motion of our own terrestrial car, driving through space — or anything else that fancy pleases to say!

There were some cloudy nights in our calendar, but they were not without suggestion. One such night I remember in June, when the play of heat-lightning was almost continuous. These flashes, or, as they seemed, gusts of light, blowing across dark clouds banked in the horizon, momentarily opened up a magnificent aerial architecture, courts, and corridors, and vistaed interiors, such as Vulcan built for the gods of Olympus. Now and then a star glanced through some loop-

hole in the flying clouds that filled the zenith. A singular interchange of chiaroscuro between cloud and clear sky was produced by the lightning: in the flash, the former stood out in bright relief, while during the interval the sky appeared lightest.

Sometimes I extended my walk along the bank of the creek, where, looking into the water, I could see another Cassiopeia's Chair gently rocking in the nether heavens; or I saw the whole blazing constellation of the Scorpion, with red Antares in its centre, reflected in the profound shallow of the stream. What of pearl gulfs, of rivers that yield the diamond? It seemed to me that one might dive or dredge for treasure much nearer home. I listened to the musical falling of the water, and thought how they malign the naiad who say the brook "babbles": to me it uttered only eternal, liquid numbers, eloquently arguing that all streams, no matter through what country they flow, have their common rise in Castaly or Helicon. Would you characterize the suave, deceitful flight of time? It cannot be better compared than to a stream slipping away through the night, unseen, cheating with its ever-present voice.

Sometimes during these night researches of mine, I seemed to be traversing the cometary matter of some mortal's dream. I then flattered myself the dreams I entertained were such as have their entrance by the gate of transparencies. It is true, I surveyed for the equatorial line dividing darkness and light, for the occult and fateful "turn of the night," held in religious awe by familiar tradition, — the Hour of the Passing of Souls; but I perceived it would be necessary to return again and again, in order to ascertain the place, or rather the time, passed through by this imaginary parallel. However, I often marked this of the "turn of the night," that in the dark hour before dawn, the temper of the night changes to something of an opposite character; from rough and blustering it frequently calms down to an ominous stillness, or from tranquillity and silence there grows up a kind of murmuring exultation and delirium.

"Day unto day uttereth speech," but "night unto night showeth knowledge," — explicit speech on the lips of day; tacit, intuitional revelation by night. Who can ever fully recall in the daytime that which he thought in the night? He must wait

for the sympathetic darkness to quicken his memory. Night thoughts, like some plants, come to perfection of bloom only in the absence of daylight. As I remember, though but defectively, the mid-watch of the night, there was an impression made on the imagination that time was superseded by eternity. Patient lay the earth, forgetful of the sun's light; 't was an uncomputed period since the last nightfall, and 't was yet twilight ages to the next dawn. In this interregnum of nothing (of nothing in human history or interest, at least) one sole person waking and watchful comes to fancy that it were easy, unaided, to take a whole city of the sleeping; also it is suggested, that, if sleep had not been a necessity of nature, we had not been doomed to die. He seems to himself the only inheritor of earthly immortality; the rest of the great family are dead, — buried in slumber, and the stars are sown over their graves.

IN PRAISE OF THE BLACKBERRY.

A DAINTY dish is the strawberry as served up with the delicate cream of praise by those who make rural nature their theme. The Muse smacks her lips, descanting upon the virtues of Fragarian juices, but is silent as regards the pleasant gift of the bramble — the glossy, Ethiop-skinned, white-hearted blackberry! Perhaps the latter's unkempt haunts and its truculent setting do not invite her. Perhaps her objection is upon chromatic grounds; having so long used her fine eyes to admire the strawberry's vermilion hue, it is quite likely that nothing less brilliant can please her. Let her remember that the blackberry too was red — in its unripe youth — but did not choose to remain so, since, as quickly as it might, it donned this royal sobriety of coloring. To its true lover, this dusky child of the bramble speaks the language of Canticles: "I am black, but comely." There is no reason why these jetty racemes — jewel-drops cut

in many rounded, polished facets, or berries compounded, each one, of many lesser berries — should not be as favorite a subject for decorative art as is the strawberry. It is strange that more is not said about the beauty of blackberry blossoms, when these so strongly exhibit the rosaceous family likeness. "Bramble-roses faint and pale" is a verse that recurs as often as I see the snowy sprays of the blackberry flower flung over the rank green wilderness beloved by the briery kind. Also, the autumnal phase of the bramble deserves admiration, its leaves under the touch of frost assuming a deep maroon color, as though they had been steeped in wine a whole season through.

Come, whether the Muse will go with us or prefers to remain in tamer fields, come away to the "slashing," where the Maryland yellow-throat warns the visitor with "Witches here! witches here!" where the geometric spider constructs her silken theorems on the largest scale, where poke and silkweed make prodigious growth, and where a not mythic Briareus holds out in his hundred scraggy hands a sweet and spicy lure. In order to prize the blackberry at its full worth it must be wrested from the ogreish genius by sin-

gle-handed contest. Nature made the strawberry defenseless, but hedged the blackberry about with prickles, as though she especially prized it, in effect saying to the gatherer, "These so-called small gains you shall not have without great pains." It is a wide distribution — Europe, Asia, and North America — which the genus Rubus enjoys; so we may suppose that the simile "As thick as blackberries" has its equivalent in other vernaculars.

The charge of insipidity is frequently brought against the blackberry; but those who thus accuse it might do well to sharpen their palate. Any sagacious taster knows that there are as many flavors in the blackberry as there are varieties of meat in the turtle! This fruit, I would say, is a kind of edible record or *résumé* of the year's weather, embodying both its clemencies and its asperities. Here is one specimen that is all luscious kindness, — you feel sure that it could have been reared only by the sun and the south; here is another, so crudely sour and acrid as to suggest that the east wind warped it in its infancy. This contrariety of flavors lends piquancy to the subject. Perhaps your blackberry is, after all, your

true bitter-sweet berry. — There are brambles and brambles, some of high, some of low degree; else we will count the dewberry as only the common blackberry fallen into ways of sweet humility, traveling along the ground with its winy, well-flavored lading. A fine breakfast fruit, no doubt — invigorating and cheering, if taken while the bead is upon it. The dewberry and the cloudberry (rare Alpine cousin of the bramble) were, surely, fit entertainment for one who journeyed by the high morning road. As a matter of fact, the only accepted time in which to go berrying is the morning. Then you have as table-companions the birds, who take the ripest and best with loud conviviality among themselves and many a witty jest at your inability to teach them good manners. You can scarcely come to the "berry patch" so early that you will not find children here before you; nor, either because you have long been out of practice, or were never in practice, will the rough briers let down their purple-black fruitage as readily for you as to the nimble brown fingers of the children.

I take into account only the amenities of blackberrying; perhaps you would also

reckon in the walk home under the hot sun, and the extreme probability that the tapestries of sleep will be figured with glimmering "worlds of blackberries."

MONDAMIN.

"First the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear."

THE original habit of maize, or Indian corn, was long a vexed question among naturalists, many of whom regarded this useful cereal as the gift of the Orient. Some maintained that it is identical with the corn of the Scriptures; others, relying on the testimony afforded by some drawings in an ancient Chinese work on natural history, inferred that the plant is of Chinese origin; still others were deceived by an ingenious forgery purporting to be a thirteenth-century document, the so-called Charter of Incisa, in which mention is made of a "kind of seed of a golden color and partly white," brought from Anatolia by Crusaders. The theory of an Egyptian origin was fortified by the finding of an ear of maize in a Theban sarcophagus (since ascertained to have been surreptitiously placed there by an Arab). The distinguished naturalist, Al-

phonse de Candolle, reviewing the subject in his "Origin of Cultivated Plants," is satisfied that maize did not proceed from the East. On the confusion of names which have been applied to this plant, he observes that "maize is called in Loraine and in the Vosges Roman corn; in Tuscany, Sicilian corn; in Sicily, Indian corn; in the Pyrenees, Spanish corn; in Provence, Barbary or Guinea corn. The Turks call it Egyptian corn, and the Egyptian Syrian *dourra*." The French name, Turkish wheat, he supposes to have been fostered by the fancied resemblance of the tufted ears to the beard of the Turk, or "by the vigor of the plant, which may have given rise to an expression similar to the French *fort comme un turc*." He is convinced that maize is of American origin, and assigns, as its possible earliest home, the table-land of Bogota, anciently inhabited by a people of considerable agricultural civilization, from whom the plant may have been derived by both Peruvian and Mexican. Certain it is that the tombs of these people frequently contain ears of maize, a fact which indicates that the plant was closely connected with the religious ceremonials of ancient America. Added to this

evidence, Darwin found ears of Indian corn buried in the sand of the Peruvian coast eighty-five feet above sea-level.

Our national escutcheon displays an eagle. Now, if it were required to choose an emblem from the vegetable kingdom to bespeak the hope and hardihood of the New World, where would the selection fall? The plant to be promoted to the place of honor must possess the virtue of accommodation, growing readily north, south, east, and west; be notable for its fruitfulness; a right-hand reliance of the pioneer; above all, it must be an immemorial occupant of the soil. The Western continent has produced the potato, the pumpkin, and the tobacco plant; also maize. The first, prone in its ways, and fruiting subterraneously, would do wrong to our national genius; the second, a golden braggart, with its earth-embracing habits, — afar be its suggestion! The third would but conjure up a vision of Columbia, lapped in nicotian haze and vagaries, inviting the nations to smoke with her! There remains only the maize, and how can we do better than to adopt as our armorial device the Indian's own plant? Behold the blonde plume-waving stranger, whom first the fast-

ing Hiawatha wrestled with, overcame, and gave due rites of burial, — Mondamin, *fort comme un turc*, yet noble in his bearing; urbane and gentle, though a savage! No other species in the list of cultivated cereals appears to such good advantage, in the isolated individual. A single full-grown plant of Indian corn, though but a fleeting, annual growth, possesses presence and dignity no less than does the oak itself. It stands erect, poised, sufficient, its green blades sweeping right and left in the curve of beauty, and ready at the wind's excitation to engage in a mock battle of scythes with its neighbors.

But we are over-hasty. Mondamin must first be laid under ground. Yearly we bury the handsome youth, who soon springs up and helps to make the yet unwritten history of the rural summer. Though we have made undoubted improvements in this direction, it is not uninteresting to learn how his obsequies were conducted in remote times. "The Indian method of planting corn was to make a conical hillock, in the top of which the corn was placed; and being used repeatedly for the same purpose, these hills became so hard that they have, in some old fields,

lasted till to-day. In some places in Michigan a heavy growth of maple has sprung up since, and yet the old corn-hills are clearly marked." Still Mondamin enjoins it upon his conquerors to watch his grave. As of old, the body-snatchers are abroad, — "Kahgahgee, the King of Ravens," and his "black marauders!" Nor does that connecting link between genus homo and hobgoblin, the scarecrow, avail to stay the miscreants; even making an example of Kahgahgee, by suspending his dead body from a pole in the midst of the field, scarcely checks the pillage. That which was planted one day frequently *comes up* by the next. Nor are the crow and the blackbird alone in evil-doing, but are reinforced by the chipmunk, a brownie that harvests untimely. Tame ducks, also, have been known to exercise a stealthy ingenuity, with their bills probing the ground diagonally until the kernel was reached and snapped off, leaving the tender shoot above ground to wither without apparent cause. The farmer's best resort against the horde of feathered trespassers seems to be a boy with a shot-gun. Unless it were Minnehaha's magic circle, no way of blessing the corn-fields so effectual as this!

ARGUMENTUM AD CORVUM.

Hither wing, you ebon knave!
East and west the scarecrows wave
Their wild panic arms to fright you
From the furrows that delight you,
Where the tender shoots of corn
Take the greeting kiss of morn,—
Hither wing, and if you can,
Plead your cause 'gainst wrathful man.
You prefer the germ and blade
To the sheaf with ripeness weighed!
Canny robber, sophist shrewd,
Bird of Machiavelian mood,
Poor in valor, braggart still,
Hoot at scarecrow if you will,
Mock and gibe, but turn your eye
On this felon posted high.
Not a plume of him is stirred,
Not a gibe from him is heard;
If your jolly life you 'd save,
Shun this field, you black-coat knave!
Though 't were folly to protect you,
Half I scorn and half respect you —
Laughing while your wings you flap
At this rusty flint-lock's snap.

First the blade. It must be an eye indifferent to contrast in color that will not take distinct delight in those little pennons of sunshiny green, fluttering above the rich umber of the soil, and signaling the welcome intelligence, "Corn is up." Every stage of its growth, as in the life of some

lovely child, is interesting and repays attention, from the time when its blades, clasping the stalk, first form chalices to hold the rain, to its midsummer pride of twofold flowerage, yellow or brownish tassel above, and flowing silk below. What strides of growth it makes from evening to the next day's light! A sly, silent bacchanal, it gets drunk upon the dew every blessed night. By and by, it is seen standing on tiptoe; toes white, or, sometimes, prettily roseate. (The farmer, I am bound to say, sees only "brace-roots," the botanist only "aerial roots," extending from the first joint of the stalk downward until they fasten themselves in the soil: yet it will be evident to one who makes corn a sympathetic study, that it stands a-tiptoe, out of pure good spirits and valiance.) Its leaf, closely scanned, shows, not one uniform green, but streakings of paler and deeper color. Hold the blade between you and the light, and you will see on each side of the strong, straight midrib an equal number of lucid hair-line channelings. The upper surface is roughish, being set with minute hairs; the under surface is of a cool smoothness. A day of "ninety in the shade" tells upon the leaves, causing them to curl their mar-

gins upward, as though to shut out the glare of the sun; but the night does not fail to bring restoration.

I listen to the whisper of corn-blades, and seem to receive hint of a mysterious council held by Mondamin and his fellow-braves. In what idiom of Cherokee, or Chippeway, or Sioux, do they converse? Or, for utmost secrecy, do they employ some of the Indian dead languages? If we studiously attend to their conversation, we shall perhaps learn some word or phrase to which even the learned Eliot did not possess the key. On still, hot days, when not a lisp of sound proceeds from these balanced sickle blades, a musical contralto murmur goes through the field, reminding one of the orchard's audible reverie in May. The bees are humming at their work among the tassels, or staminate flowers, of the corn. Each laborer flies away with a good packful of yellow pollen, the substance of bee-bread, or, more properly speaking, of bee johnny-cake, sweet and wholesome, made from the fine bolted meal of the flower, whereas, later on, our own cake will be made of the coarser grist of the kernel. Perhaps it is the scent of the blossoms which attracts the bees, for the corn-

blossom possesses a fragrance as characteristic as that of the clover-bloom, — a homely, hearty sweetness, food-promising.

We shall scarcely find a fairer midsummer picture, more of the spirit which broods in the midsummer fields, or more of the temper which contemplation of their tranquil beauty inspires, than in Sidney Lanier's poem, "The Waving of the Corn," from which I quote the last stanza: —

> "From here to where the louder passions dwell,
> Green leagues of hilly separation roll:
> Trade ends where yon far clover ridges swell.
> Ye terrible Towns, ne'er claim the trembling soul
> That, craftless all to buy, or hoard, or sell,
> From out your deadly complex quarrel stole
> To company with large amiable trees,
> Sucks summer honey with unjealous bees,
> And takes Time's strokes as softly as this morn
> Takes waving of the corn."

It is noticeable that the primitive significance of the word *corn*, still retained in Great Britain, is almost entirely lost in this country. Here, wheat is not corn, but "wheat" or "grain," and your farmer would stare at a proposition so absurd as that of "reaping the corn." It is too late in the day to recover the word to its original wider use, and substitute for its present ap-

plication the term Indian corn, or simply maize; but since maize was the earliest corn of America, why object to its carrying off the titulary honors? It is no mean victor. If the dusky planter of old time could revisit the site of his corn-hills, he might well start in amazement at the stature which his favorite plant has reached under the pale-face's persuasive treatment. In the centre and raciest soil of the "corn belt," it is not uncommon for corn to stand at more than twice a tall man's height; at fifteen feet or more, in some instances. Like Cotton Mather, in some matter of information regarding the workings of witchcraft, I am the ear-witness of one who was an eye-witness in the measuring of a stalk of maize which fell no inch short of nineteen feet! The farmer of such rich fields, when he goes through the corn, is scarcely able to touch the ear with his upreached hand. Beside these Brobdingnagian legions wearing the green, how squat and insignificant had appeared the Prussian Emperor's famous tall regiment! From forty to fifty bushels (shelled corn) is the common production to the acre, while eighty and even one hundred bushels are the rate of return from most favorable soils, the ag-

gregate corn crop of the United States yearly mounting into the hundred million bushels. We may be pardoned some "tall talk" about that which has to commend it not only tallness, but a generous amplitude as well. At the New Orleans Exposition it was Nebraska's emblazoned boast, "Corn is King," — a boast which wins ready consent when one reflects upon the royal beneficence of maize. On the occasion of the last great freshets of the Ohio River, two counties in the State of Kansas (mindful of a good turn they had received after a scourge of grasshoppers) freighted a long train of cars with corn, and forwarded golden plenty to their needy neighbors in the East.

When we go to Sybaris, if the time be midsummer, I know not how they can entertain us better than to set before us dishes of boiled corn, — ay, *sweet* corn, tender, milky, — the full corn in the ear, requiring nothing more than the grace of a little salt. And if we go to Sparta, and their storehouse happens to afford only some ears of field corn, cannot we manage to do with these, provided the grinders are not too few, or our hardy friends have a little fire, so that they can serve us the kernels parched? But we are

forgetting that Indian corn, Zea Mays, was not known to Sybaris and Sparta.

An expression of a somewhat scurrilous import is current. We have heard of "corn-fed Westerners." But why resent an epithet which has an Homeric breadth of suggestion in it, as when in the Iliad, we read of

> "The renowned milk-nourished men, the Hippemolgians,
> Long-lived, most just, and innocent."

Milk-nourished are they who make their repasts off sweet corn.

From 54° north to 40° south latitude, inclusive, should not be thought a meagre garden-plot. Such, at all events, Indian corn enjoys in the Western continent. If the various peoples inhabiting between the two oceans should determine to celebrate, on a certain day, a feast of brotherly love, some preparation of maize, as being most convenient to all, would probably be fixed upon as the symbolic comestible. So, in tropical America, the inhabitants would observe the rite by partaking of tortilla and pinole; in our own South pone and hoecake, in the North brown bread and johnny-cake, would occupy the pious consideration of the celebrants; while here and there would rise the steam of various polentas of savory name,

hominy, samp, mush, or hasty-pudding, — the last duly honored in song by a warm-hearted muse of New England yore.

In some parts of the West, where wood is scarce and corn most abundant, the latter is sometimes used to feed the hearth-fire. Diligent creature of the earth, and servant of man's comfort, furnishing both food and the fagot with which to cook it! A novel idea this, — to provide one's fuel by annual spring-time plantings, gathering the thrift thereof each autumn. Every last fibre of the maize has its use, as becomes a native plant. If the ear gives food, the stalk furnishes fodder for the keeping of our domestic animals. Baskets may be made of the stalks, and mats braided of the husks, of which, also, a very good quality of paper has been made. Many a "corn-fed Westerner," though he may not indulge in sleep upon the sheaves in after-harvest idleness, does not scorn a couch of husks, even preferring it to the ancestral feather-bed. I have lost the ear, with other zests, of childhood, so that I cannot now decide which of three, dandelion pipe, bass-wood whistle, corn-stalk fiddle, makes the best music. I incline to think that the last-named instrument requires

a degree of skill in its construction not less than that which went to the notching of a reed by the streams of Arcady, since our rustic violin must be fashioned entire from one piece of stalk, the golden strings thereof subtly carven from the body of the instrument, then critically raised upon a bridge; in which delicate operations much choice material has been spoiled.

But the corn-husking should not pass unmentioned, whether this merry rite be accomplished under barn-roof or in the open field. Afield, poetic suggestion is more rife. How is it that, surveying the long lines of autumnal shocks, we are reminded of the aboriginal no less than when the summer field asserted its plumed chieftaincy? The Indian's corn and the Indian's summer! In this fine brief season named for him, his wigwam villages dot many a sunny field, dwelt in by what friendly tribe, plying, if invisibly, what arts of peace a savage may! With half-shut eyes looking through the quivering hazy air upon the further fields, fancy helping, you seem to receive intimations of their village fires; almost, a slight film of smoke can be detected stealing upward from the tufted tops of the wigwams.

No sooner are the shocks disturbed than the humble lodgers — not Indians, but a race whose ancestors were probably here contemporaneous with the Indian — scatter, panic-stricken, leaving their ruined granaries behind them. Usually, there is not wanting some worthless farm-house dog, some Skip, or Bounce, or Towser, who, animated by the prospect of a cheap hunt, stands by when the shock is thrown down, ready to give the miserable fugitives death-gripe. I own to small compassion for a bread-and-cheese-fed rodent in the cat's clutches, but I have a tender interest for the wild mice of the shock, in their hour of peril. Taken into hand, they remain quite motionless, only the small warm body throbbing with its volume of fear. The physiognomy of the field-mouse lacks the sophistry which characterizes the expression of the domestic species, and its thick, soft fur is as agreeable to the touch as that of the other is repugnant.

This *maizy* text has for punctuation marks the fruit of the pumpkin distributed here and there as colons and periods. Very likely the goldfinches are gathering seed-harvest in the weedy purlieus of the field, keeping up the while a constant flow of silvery "small

talk." At this time of the year all toil has a flavor of indolence, — is half play. So, as we sit among the corn shocks, in the tempered warmth of the south-going sun, we find something very pleasant in this task of removing garment after garment of the elaborate suit in which Nature has chosen to clothe the ear of the maize. Off come the sunburnt and rusty outer husks, which are as a sort of rough-and-ready great-coat; under this the vesture is of increasing fineness until the innermost husk is reached; this is of a tissuey or crape-like delicacy, the edges minutely hirsute or downy. Methinks when the stout husks are parted, the ear, with all its ivory well-set kernels, smiles broadly, declaring there 's luck in *even* numbers, if you will believe its testimony, since the number of rows on all the ears in all the corn-fields of the land is, invariably, some multiple of the number two, as eight and twelve, and even as high as twenty-four and thirty-two, or more.

Rarely, the husker finds an ear which has the blush of the peach or the crimson of the ripe maple leaf. Has the botanist an explanation of this anomaly? We might imagine that maize, far back in its history, had

an erubescent ancestor, or that the maize-ear of the future will wear brighter colors than at present; or we might suspect that this familiar crop unconsciously emulates the chromatic splendors of the season, and so occasionally produces a red ear. To whatever conclusion we come, the rustic lovers of the old-time husking doubtless knew more than we do about the matter.

> "And whene'er some lucky maiden
> Found a red ear in the husking,
> Found a maize-ear red as blood is,
> 'Nushka!' cried they altogether,
> 'Nushka! you shall have a sweetheart!'"

THE SOLITARY BEE.

A VERY slight and fugacious hint from Nature is enough to excite expectation in one who cultivates her friendship and favor. Fancy starts up, and follows the foot-marks along the earth, or the wing-prints in air, — unless, indeed, it be a very dull and jaded fancy. Not long ago, as I was reading in the open air, I became conscious that some musical insect was busy in a rose-bush near by. On looking up, I saw a bee just hovering in departure, a portion of green leaf folded in its embrace. In an instant the creature was gone, with a mellow touch of the "flying harp." At that moment the whole visible world seemed to pertain to the ingenious bee: I had been singularly favored that I had seen the insect at all, and a glimpse of the queen of fays and her "little team of atomies" could scarcely have surprised or pleased me more. However, I began to regret that I had not seen the leaf-cutter plying her keen-edged scissors, and to

wish that I might find where she went with her plunder. I examined the leaves of the rose-bush, and was surprised to notice how many of them had been subjected to the scissors. The snipping had been done in two patterns, — deep, nearly circular scallops, and oblong segments with the corners rounded. The edges were left quite smooth, from which it was evident that the operant was no crude prentice hand.

After this chance introduction to the leaf-cutter (who I found bore the burdensome name Megachile), I watched the ways of my distinguished new acquaintance, and made sundry attempts to trace her from the rose-bush to the laboratory in which she worked up the raw material of the leaves: this, I fancied, would be either an excavation in old wood or a burrow underground; it proved, in the case of my acquaintance, to be neither of these.

My quest met with no success, until, one day in the vegetable garden, I observed a thick-set, dusky bee, with narrow yellow bands, entering the hollow of an onion-top, two or three inches of which had been cut off. No wonder my curiosity ran high: could this be the residence of the aristocratic

leaf-cutter? Could it be, that one whom I had mentally associated with Titania herself should have no finer perception of elegant congruity than to set up housekeeping within walls of garlic, bringing thereto rose-leaf appointments? If so, I thought it would be no slander to report the hymenopterous tribe as deficient in the sense of smell. I waited for the bee to come out, which she presently did, and then I peeped into the onion-top, where I discovered a cell in process of construction. As there were other cut or broken tops, I examined those also, and found several that were similarly occupied. Some stalks contained one, others two cylindrical cells about an inch long, the sides formed by overlapping oblong bits of rose-leaves, while the top and bottom were closed with circular pieces, the whole structure held together as though it had been pressed in a mould. The inner layers were united by means of a substance that acted as cement. Afterward, when I compared the pieces of which these cells were composed with the notches in the rose-leaves, it seemed not impossible that, with time and patience, the cut-out portions might be fitted in their original places. In some cases, as I split the

onion stalk, the bee was still at work storing bee-bread for the support of her offspring, and could not be induced to leave until all but the inner walls of her laboratory had been torn away. Some cells were already closed, and within was the large waxen-looking larva, feeding on the provision laid up by its solicitous parent, its appetite unimpaired by the garlicky character of the flavoring.

I have yet to learn that a community of leaf-cutters (in an onion bed, too!) is a matter of ordinary occurrence; certainly, it will cause me some surprise if the novelty should be repeated another season. To speak of a community of solitary bees would be to speak in paradox; and it should be added that these insects, though occupying the same neighborhood, apparently exchanged no social civilities. I remember to have questioned one of these independents very closely on the subject, — to have questioned and to have been answered in some such way as the following: —

Lone leaf-cutter in thy cell,
Where the green leaves of the rose
Thee, as in a bud, enclose, —
Solitary, do thou tell
Why thou choosest thus to dwell,
Helping build no amber comb,
Sharing no rich harvest-home!

Hummed the recluse at her task:
"Though an idle thing thou ask,
I will freely answer thee,
If thou, first, wilt clearly show
Something I have wished to know, —
How the hivéd honey-bee
Can forego sweet privacy!"

THE RETURN OF A NATIVE.

It was never distinctly understood by his compatriots how Truesdale had earned the title of filibuster. The blending of reproach and glory implied in this term he bore with dignity and good-humor, and, it was sometimes suspected, with inner complacency. He touched but lightly upon the sequence of events which in his adventurous young manhood had turned the current of his life away from the ordinary channels. For many years he had been as complete an alien as it is possible for one to be who still at intervals stands on his country's threshold to discharge some errand of merely commercial interest. He had made his home in an old Spanish city in that portion of our continent which the geographies designate Central, but which, viewed in the light of all that is characteristically American, has more than a European remoteness and indifferency. Another language had become more ready to his thought than his mother-tongue, and in

employing the latter his phrases were tinged with an unconscious euphuism, the natural effect produced by a Latin graft upon the long-neglected stock of the vernacular.

A few months previous to the incidents here to be narrated Truesdale had arrived in New York, with the vague purpose of renewing an acquaintance with his countrymen, and of studying the social conditions in his native land, about which he had almost a foreigner's curiosity. What happened soon after his return — how in him society joyfully recognized a genuine specimen from the remote regions in its charts marked *Hîc sunt leones* — it is not within the province of this sketch to relate. Perhaps he had not disdained the *rôle* of splendid barbarian; he may not have been altogether unwilling to "grace my own triumph," as he had characterized his acquiescence with the schemes of his exhibitors: yet, in his serious reflections, he felt that he had made but small progress in the study which he had proposed to himself; he had been stripping layer after layer off the social nut, and yet so far had not reached the kernel of essential sweetness. It was at this point in the experiment that he spoke often, albeit somewhat floridly, of

the "dear old sylvan life of the West;" his boyhood's home; the tender associations it held for him; the idyllic and grotesque characters, the homely worth, which had flourished there. As it was with the lotos-eaters, so with himself; he, too, knew how sweet it is

> "To muse, and brood, and live in memory
> With those old faces of our infancy,
> Heaped over with a mound of grass."

Oftenest, in his reverie, he saw the small chamber that had been his, in his mother's house: the whitewashed walls, the slant ceiling, the one window opening towards the morning. There, what dreams he had entertained! — surely not of frontier adventure and the cruelties of war, but of a life dear to Apollo and the Muses. It was when this retrospective mood was upon him that he was wont to show his metropolitan friends an old ambrotype portrait of a youth, with pensive, Antinous face, framed with loose ringlets of dark hair, these falling over a wide, rolling collar of the fashion known as Byronic. The portrait having elicited the usual romantic and speculative comments, Truesdale would observe in a careless, reminiscential tone, "A most unfortunate young

fellow I knew years ago. Wrote poetry; thought he had the divine afflatus. Checkered career, — gold-mining, fighting greasers, and what not; dead long ago, if reports are to be trusted." Rumors of his own demise had more than once reached Truesdale; and on one occasion he had been charged with imposture, when personating himself supposed deceased.

Previous to this unlooked-for attack of nostalgia, it had been in vain to urge Truesdale's revisitation of his old home, though frequent pressing invitations had been sent him by the remnant of his family residing there. He had not believed in your sentimental pilgrimage. "When you are disposed to go back and touch the shrine with your hands, don't do it; keep at a discreet, worshiping distance," had been his precept. But he had not been a day in "old Hillsboro'" before his objection to the sentimental pilgrimage was dispelled. He blessed the lazy immutability of the times and manners illustrated in the lives of his old friends and neighbors. As he looked on the summer fields, it seemed to him that they were still waving the unshorn harvests of twenty years ago. He was pleased to see above him

the same "low, Hillsboro' sky," held up at the horizon by tall, Atlas-shouldered woods, — the sky that had shut down too close, the woods that had presented a hostile phalanx, to his impatient youth. Chiefly was he pleased that he could be thus pleased with the old scenes and associations. Did it not argue, he asked himself, that his heart was still warm and impressionable, open to all gentle influences, as is the soil to the ministrations of sun and dew?

He had visited the village burying-ground, given over to the care of blooming sweet-brier and wild strawberry in early summer, and later to aster, golden-rod, and life-everlasting. A long time he had stood, with uncovered head, beside his mother's grave, and then had moved but a few steps away, where a low headstone bore the legend, "Rosalie Graham. Aged twenty-one. 'There the wicked cease from troubling, and the weary are at rest.'" A strange scripture for her, it seemed to him. When had the wicked troubled her tranquil and innocent life? He, at least, had gone away, and had not spoken aught to vex her. Weary? He could not believe it, with her fresh young face still blooming in his memory.

He had not neglected to attend the Sabbath morning service in the little, lonesome, white-painted, sun-beaten church, that stood at one side of the village green. He could not enough praise the devout faith and abounding good works of those whom he curiously denominated "Apostolic Methodists." In them he recognized the stuff of the Huguenots, of the Covenanters, and the Puritans. Their prayers and exhortations, he demonstrated, were as replete with natural poetry as with fervent piety. "A well-spring in a desert land," "stately steppings of the Almighty," "abundant entrance into the kingdom," — where could you find more lively imagery, more vigorous English, than in these and like expressions contained in the unwritten ritual of this earnest, faithful people? Indeed, he now gave himself, both by observation and practice, to recover the short, stout, Anglo-Saxon vocables, which so many years' use of a foreign language had wrested from his command. He had been freshly convinced of the great resources afforded in the vernacular, by hearing an old neighbor, noted for her allocutive energy, remark that she had "just given the hired man a good tongue-banging"!

As a matter of course, Truesdale had called upon Uncle Gail Hartwell, now in his ninety-second year, and mentally dwelling among the events of the early portion of the century. Truesdale, sentimentally moved by the sight of the worthy patriarch and the generations gathered around him, had repeated the "seven ages of man." "And did old Bony write that you 've been a-sayin' ?" asked the patriarch, who had listened with misty attention. "Ah, yes," Truesdale had observed in an aside, "Bony was a sweet poet."

In this bronzed, foreign-appearing man, this stranger so anxious to be treated as a native, Hillsboro' people had at first found it difficult to recognize the youth they had known in times past. Afterwards, all were desirous to substantiate the great truth that the boy is father of the man. One testified that Truesdale had once, in the coldest January weather, walked ten miles to borrow a book owned by deponent's uncle. Another, surveying the hero's imposing height and muscularity, affirmed that he "always told 'em there was pluck enough in Jim Truesdale to stock a nation." Still another remembered that when they went to "dees-

trick" school "Jimmy was always A No. 1 in geography. P'int to South Afriky, an' he knew all about it, 'cause he was goin' there some day to shoot lions; p'int to Brayzil, an' he was goin' there to clean out them di'mon's in the big river; an' he said he 'd go over them Alps, if he had to pour vinegar on 'em, as Hannybil did!"

Whatever desperate passages there may have been in Truesdale's history, no truculent indices appeared in his countenance, its expression being uniformly one of serene self-reliance. Yet there were those who noticed that his eyes had a habit of masked watchfulness, while others saw in the same eyes something of elate expectancy. Certain it was, if, looking up the tame country road, he remarked, "What is that coming yonder? It has the appearance of an Indian on horseback," the observation was sufficient to stir the imagination of any youthful hearer. Also, in the summer evenings spent at the farm-house of his relatives, when he would pace up and down the floor, occasionally pausing at the open door and peering into the twilight scene without, the action suggested that at some time in his life such sentinel-like vigilance had been habit-

ual. While there was little in his present appearance that could be construed as indicating a bellicose element in his past, it is true that if the glossy locks of his dark hair (just touched with a first frost) had been parted at a certain place, a long white mark, the scar of an old sabre-cut, would have been disclosed. He carried a cane, but with such adroitness as to make its use appear a whimsicality of taste, rather than a necessity. None would have suspected that an old hip wound, still troublesome at intervals, strongly recommended the services of a walking-stick. Some good Hillsboro' souls kindly prescribed for his supposed rheumatism, — that malady being perennially prevalent in the community.

At a picnic, as he had anticipated, Truesdale had a rare opportunity to taste the half-forgotten flavor of rural social life. At this picnic (the holiday confluence of two neighboring schools) were present, besides the demure young school-mistresses and their small summer flocks, the parents of the children and many friends of education. Among these last, most of them old acquaintances of Truesdale, was Squire Jerrold, a person of authority in Hillsboro', as became one con-

nected with the Jerrolds in the East. Had *Colonel* Truesdale (Hillsboro' etiquette had decided that this prefix was suitable) ever seen the Genealogy of the Jerrold Family? No? Then he must see it. Squire Jerrold was troubled with headache and dizziness, but had been much comforted by the perusal of the ancestral record: all the Jerrolds, so far as he could gather, had had "something the matter with their heads," especially those who had been eminent in professional life. In politics the squire was a staunch Democrat, and an adorer of that canonized patriot, General Jackson. Though not profane in his habits of speech, he was known sometimes, in vehement debate, to employ the favorite oath of his political idol. When he did so, with an effort to dilate his small frame and to clinch his short, soft fingers into a forcible fist, the effect was most laughable, or pathetic, according to the character or the mood of the spectator.

Next to the squire, on the temporary seating arranged for those who were to listen to the children's exercises, sat Elder Doolittle. He was a large, vigorous man, a powerful preacher, so called by those who sat under his Boanergic ministration of gospel truth.

His massive head was rendered larger in appearance by the abundance of iron-gray hair which it bore, and which its owner, by the unconscious working of some curious cranial muscle, could bring down over his forehead to within an inch and a half of his bushy eyebrows. Had his scalp been of india rubber, its elasticity and recoil could scarcely have been greater. Whether this agitation of the outer integument was related to the inner act of cerebration might have been a fit subject for scientific investigation. The elder exchanged hearty greetings with Truesdale, who, he felt sure, had been sent to his charge to be rescued as a brand from the burning.

Among the friends of education before mentioned was old Sammy Upson, the cooper. With no drop of Celtic blood in his veins, nevertheless he could scarcely open his mouth without an Irish bull issuing therefrom. In relating his experience in the class-meeting, a few Sundays before, he had most feelingly referred to the time "when I lay on my death-bed." On being nudged by his grand-daughter, who sat beside him, he had added, "my death-bed, as it were, though the Lord, in his infinite wisdom, saw

fit to spare me for a few more fleetin' years!" His latest felicity of this sort had been uttered while on the witness-stand, in a suit being tried at the county-seat. Such and such things had happened so and so, he attested, as sure as he held up his hand betwixt God and heaven!

Between old Sammy Upson and Moffitt Herkimer sat Hollering Clapp, whose stentorian voice, in the old days, could be heard as far as any farm-house noon-bell could send its summons. Many a time had Truesdale listened to the musical storms awakened in the West Woods by Clapp's singing of his favorite hymns, while his axe rang in unison. It was touching now to observe how thin and piping had become that phenomenal voice, confessing to its own disabilities. "Could n't holler now worth a cent. All used up with coughin'. S'pose I 've got the long lingerin' consumption."

Truesdale remembered Moffitt Herkimer as having excelled in every department of woodcraft; never a bee-tree but Moffitt Herkimer was informed as to its exact locality; never a 'coon-hunt in which his sagacity and agility were not exercised; never a well to be dug, on anybody's farm, but the witch-

hazel in his canny hand must be consulted. He had also been the best runner in five townships. On Truesdale's asking whether he could now get over the ground as rapidly, he replied, "Wall, I cal'late I could, mebbe. Give me a smooth road, an' if my soles wa'n't too tender from wearin' shoes so much, in these days, I cal'late I could run to the Centre inside of three minutes and a half."

"No, you could n't, you ole fool," interposed Mrs. Herkimer, whose remarkably hard common sense never dealt in euphemism, "you could n't, and you know you could n't, — all stiffened up with the rheumatiz as you be. Had to have a chair to get up into the buggy with, last Sunday!"

Very refreshing to Truesdale's eye was the scene before him. The green recesses of the wood; the slight motion of the leaves; the lights and shadows that played over the little stage, changefully brocading the white dresses of the two girlish teachers; the happy children, in their holiday attire, now "coming to order" at a word from her who acted as mistress of ceremonies, — all pleased the returned native more than any pageant of civic prosperity he had ever witnessed. Where under heaven were the

children so favored, so well clothed, so well mannered, so intelligent, and apt withal, as here in his own country?

During the opening exercises, — in part performed by a melodeon, which seemed to express astonishment at its own presumption in trying to fill so vast an auditorium, — a singular arrival was noticed. This might have been some grotesque genius of the wood, — some *lusus*, called into existence by Nature in her most rollicking mood. Advancing slowly, the new comer threw himself upon an inviting bed of moss under a tree, and there stretched out his rotund proportions, while he surveyed the holiday company with an air of lazy enjoyment. "Fatty Wheaton," whispered one of Truesdale's juvenile friends. "He 's fat, like that, because his folks let him eat so much pork when he was a baby. He 's been asked to go with a circus, but his folks won't let him."

The opening exercises over, a pale-faced, tow-haired boy came upon the stage, and in shrill-pitched voice announced that he was trying to climb the Hill of Science, and that Truth was his guide and sure reliance. The young pilgrim had much difficulty in making the ascent, having several times to be

prompted. "That boy must be a Hackett, and that accounts for his perplexities," thought Truesdale. "No Hackett was ever known to climb the slight elevation he speaks of." Next, a gypsy maiden, with sunburnt hair of many shades, and lips and cheeks red as the fruit of the wild rose, extolled, in rapid sing-song, the advantages and pleasures to be found in country life. Then, a tall boy came forward with a temperance piece, depicting in Miltonic blank verse the envious strife stirred up in Pandemonium by a certain peregrinating fiend, who boasted of the mischief he had accomplished upon the earth: —

> "But tell me first, O mighty spirit, thy name.
> 'My name,' the fiend replied, 'is Alcohol!'"

After this, a bevy of girls filled the little stage, and a dialogue entitled "Gossip" was acted. Each gossip had sewing or knitting work in her hands; there was frequent laying together of shrewd heads, much mysterious whispering, much lifting of the eyebrows in scandalized amazement, while many promises of secrecy were exacted.

The exercises went forward, but Truesdale had dropped into a reverie. As he bent his eyes upon the ground, a plant with deli-

cate green leaves and small yellow flowers arrested his attention. It seemed bending forward to say, "I know you, but I see you have forgotten me." Its name did not at once come to his mind, but when it did he was pleased, recognizing an old acquaintance. Wood-sorrel? — of course it was; and he tried his memory with other plants around him, and had soon added cohosh, milkweed, and lobelia to the list of his botanical recollections. The grass, — how fat and sleek it grew in one place, shining with prosperity? What would he not have given for such a grass-plot transferred to his garden in the tropics! Did anybody know how good it was to see the grass growing, after living under a sun too fervid for this temperate, cool-blooded plant? Would it not be sweet to take up his life anew under these old trees that had shaded the home of his childhood? Enough had he seen of the cocoa and the orange-tree; these had been well; but now give him an apple-orchard and a title to the West Woods of Hillsboro'. What better could he do, perhaps, than return here for good, buy a little farm, and live the "gentle life"? Perhaps some daughter of Arcadia —

But a daughter of Arcadia was even now sweetly smiling, sweetly speaking; and her words, addressed to him, were these: —

"We would be pleased to listen to some remarks from Colonel Truesdale."

There was a hush of expectation in which all eyes were turned towards the colonel, who slowly rose to his feet. I pretend to no clairvoyant cleverness; the account of what passed through his mind is based upon his own affidavit. He rose to his feet, because it was expected that he should do so. The events of his life drifted before him, as in the retrospect of a drowning man. Now, now, do these good people think to reach the heart of his mystery. Now must he show them his scars, and they will give him their most sweet voices. He takes a step forward. Something to interest the children, of course. Then, they would, perhaps, like to hear how a jaguar — a bold, bad beast, dear children — met his death in his own den. Two balls of fire in the dark were the mark of the dare-devil fellow. . . . Or take this: Four riders, hotly pursued. They spur their horses, and bid fair to escape. But a chasm is reached. Leap it, or fall into the hands of the enemy. Three go

over safely. The fourth tries to follow. *Adios, mundo!* — good-by, world! and down. . . . Or this: Evening, after a red day of battle. On this side, the moon rising over the long mountain wall; on that, the ocean and the sunset. A band of soldiers, a couple of prisoners, halt before a small village. The vesper hymn, — chanted prayer for pardon and peace, — sweet and solemn. The younger prisoner joins in the singing, though to-morrow — who knows? His voice rings out clear. When the hymn is done, the dark-eyed women of the village gather around him. "*El es muy suave*, — he is very gentle. Soldiers, don't kill him." . . . Good heavens! what tales are these to pour into the ears of these innocent children! There must be another way, thus: My dear young friends, you are to-day assembled here in the capacity of — a picnic. It rejoices my heart to be permitted to mingle with you here, for I was once as you are. I once roved through these sylvan aisles, warbling my wood-notes wild. Just as you do now, I set traps for the squirrels, and fished out of Crooked *Crick*. Like you, I went to school, loved my books and teacher dear. As I grew up I increased in virtue and wisdom,

and became a bright and shining — filibuster. Fought, bled, and died, times without number. Returning to the home of my youth, the elders arise and call me Colonel, and you all listen, enraptured, to the mellifluous accents of this chin-music of mine.

Up to this point in his unmouthed eloquence, the face of the filibuster had worn an expression of dreamy abstraction, now changing rapidly to one of bewilderment and appeal. Help him, ye woodland powers! How very still it is! —so still that he hears distinctly the hum of bees at work in the blossoms of yonder basswood. He also hears the snuffings and pawings of some canine zealot (doubtless Tige Herkimer) bent upon unearthing a woodchuck. But what evil spell is this? *Vox faucibus hæsit.* Stage-fright, aha! Had he not harangued and subdued the myrmidons of war? Had he not overruled, in secret juntos, by the crafty persuasiveness of his voice and speech? Had he not, like another Othello, held society, like another Desdemona, entranced by the moving and pictorial quality of his language? And should he now quail before a handful of country children? No! and yet it seemed inevitable. What a merciful de-

liverance if he could but see a charge of greasers breaking through the thicket on his right! Single-handed he would defend his people! He was so taken with this idea that he actually bent a faint smile of scrutiny in the direction of the wished-for raid.

He knew not how long he had stood thus. He perceived that his friends were growing solicitous on his account. Elder Doolittle evinced his sympathetic distress by an unusually violent twitching of his movable scalp, bringing his hair and eyebrows much nearer together than had ever been observed before. The sufferer from long lingerin' consumption was inspired to a paroxysm of coughing, which succeeded in attracting considerable attention away from the spell-bound orator. Old Sammy Upson puckered his dry lips, ready for a prolonged whistle of amazement; while Dave Hackett, who had always owed Jim Truesdale a grudge for the latter's "fine-haired notions," smiled with derisive satisfaction. The younger of the two pretty school-teachers, at this trying juncture losing her self-control, tittered audibly. At length, a friend of our hero, perceiving the hopelessness of the situation, came to the rescue. "I would suggest, with

Colonel Truesdale's concurrence," said this friend, "that further remarks be deferred until the children, who are getting rather impatient, have had refreshments."

The colonel, with a grave smile and inflection of his head, signified his concurrence. The children, considering themselves dismissed, deserted their hard seats, and were soon expectantly ranged on each side of the long table, which groaned (if table ever groaned) under its feastful burden. Delicious proclamation of this plenty went abroad on the air. Some bees left their mealy labor in the basswood-tree, and came over to the table, where they behaved themselves like true Sybarites. As the festivity proceeded, Fatty Wheaton was not forgotten. Whether from shyness or an indisposition towards leaving his mossy couch, he had refused to take his place with the other children; but the good women who dispensed the feast plied him with every sort of delicacy which the table afforded. It appeared to them that, by such attentions, the weight of his obese misery might be lessened.

With but one exception, all were prepared to do justice to the bountiful dinner. This exception was not to be found among the

children; nor could it have been Moffitt Herkimer, who declared himself keen enough to eat a woodchuck. (Who, if not he, knew the flavor of woodchuck?) The exception could not have been Squire Jerrold. With a school-boy fondness for sweetmeats, which led him to keep a jar of candies in the closet at home, as also to have his pockets supplied with some sort of "drops" for his hoarseness, he was now engaged in abstracting the raisins from his pudding and the icing from his cake. Elder Doolittle, with the earnestness that characterized all his actions, gave himself to the full enjoyment of the "creature benefits" referred to in the grace pronounced by him. No one had lost an appetite unless it was the filibuster. Verily, dead-sea apples could not have been bitterer to his taste than was the wholesome and delicious food with which his injured friends insisted upon heaping his plate. How could he partake of their kind hospitality, when he had failed to perform the paltry part assigned to him in the day's exercises? He was grimly amused, sitting between the squire and the elder, to note their efforts to restore his spirits by relating embarrassments similar to his own, which had happened in their experience.

"D' I ever tell you, elder, about the fix I got into down at Plainfield, once when I tried to make a p'litical speech there, just before 'lection? I 'd committed every word of it to memory, and then, to make a dead-sure thing of it, I copied it to take with me. Well, I 'd been going on swimmingly for about five minutes, when I came up stump. Recollect the very sentence I stuck on: 'Let us, who cherish the star-bright palladium of our rights, secured to us by him who, inflexible in his patriotism, was fitly styled "Old Hickory," — let us' — I said that 'let us' over and over, until some young peppersass in the back part of the room put in, 'Go right ahead; we 'll let ye.' Searched my pockets, and pulled out a paper; but by the Eternal! it wa'n't my speech at all, — only a stack of old letters I 'd put in by mistake."

"That reminds me, Squire Jerrold, of how I got bushed, when I first entered the ministry. I had to preach before the presiding elder at Copenhagen. I took for my text, "TEKEL: thou art weighed in the balances, and art found wanting." Of course the sermon was extempore; preaching with notes was n't approved of then. I got through TEKEL all right, and then I broke

down completely, — in fact had to sit down; and Elder Woolever had to continue the exercises. As I was subject to palpitation in those days, the congregation took it for granted that I had had one of my bad turns."

Thus, in the goodness of their hearts, Masters Slender and Shallow strove to comfort and cheer Master Silence. He, however, refused to be comforted, and as soon as he could without giving offense took his way home by a cross-cut through the West Woods; whipping with his cane the innocent herbage in his path, and not stopping, as he had thought to do, to see if certain old landmarks were still remaining. Sylvan things had lost their charm.

To this day, Truesdale counts "that disgraceful *fiasco* of mine at the picnic" as among the serious chagrins of a lifetime. "But what could I do?" he asks. "To do the least thing well, a man must have had practice. I could not 'make remarks' to the school, because my training in that direction had been neglected."

AUTUMN AND THE MUSE.

VERY neighborly and obliging are the four seasons, readily lending their effects to each other in a way most confusing to the careful annalist who tries to keep the score. It is to be presumed that, if an exact record were kept of all these lendings and borrowings, the account would be found to balance at the end of the year; meanwhile, it is a source of perplexity to see October occasionally wearing apple-blossoms in his crown, or December spreading over his rough tent-poles the ethereal canopy of June, or merry May personating November, with a presence so chill and forbidding that all the courtiers tremble and forget their honeyed speeches. Long before the autumn is openly proclaimed I perceive its emissaries and diplomats are with us. At the very height of summer's supremacy there is secret defection; bribes have been given and taken; treason is brewing. Under its dull green cloak, the apple-tree hides a bright golden

bough, that surely would win for its bearer the favor of Proserpine. In the deepest retired places of the woods sedition has been busy; that false-hearted tree, the pepperidge, has been transferring its allegiance to the enemy, strewing the dark mosses with its pied red and yellow leafage. No arts employed by Summer, no spectacles intended to show her power and prosperity, can make me forget the ominous handwriting I have seen in the forest temple. Also, when in August I find and taste that pleasant, quasi-tropical fruit, the mandrake apple (in the botany described as "slightly acid, mawkish, eaten by pigs and boys"), I seem to acquire additional knowledge of the plans and movements of autumn. It is always with some surprise that I mark the reappearance of the small floral star that moves in the front of the season; can it again be time for the aster? With the aster the golden-rod. The two set out for a long ramble through the country. Their association is of mutual advantage, inasmuch as each affords a chromatic foil for the other.

The complementary colors are very gratifying to the eye; and it is certainly no wonder if they suggest the purple and gold of royalty.

"And like proud lovers bent
In regal courtesy, as kings might woo,
Tall golden-rods, bareheaded in the dew,
Above the asters leant."

Perhaps no other members of our native flora are so often celebrated by the native muse as these two autumn ramblers. Their comeliness and home-breeding ought sufficiently to endear them. Yet it is to be suspected there is something else which equally recommends them to our poets, namely, their musical and pictorial names. For instance, there is metrical suggestion in

Golden-rod and aster —

a smooth start for a trochaic verse; or, if you prefer the measure of "fatal facility," take this: —

The aster and the golden-rod.

It is a matter of regret that the Eupatorium tribe have not more euphonious common names to entitle them to a place in the poet's flora. The beautiful *E. ageratoides*, powdering open woodlands as with early snow, deserves, but seldom, if ever, receives, mention. As for boneset and joe-pye weed, they are out of the question while retaining these appellations. There is more reason for regret that the iron-weed (*Vernonia*) has

not a finer name, since it is one of the richest adornments of early autumn. Its sombre purple is a pleasing relief from the gaudy yellows of the season — a bit of Tyre in the prevailing Eldorado of color. Yet the aster and the golden-rod tribes must be the ones specially beloved by Nature, for she makes their days long in the land — even longer than those of her spring-time favorites, the violet and the dandelion. As though she regretted having turned the tide of the season, and would now hold it from ebbing away, she determines

> "To set budding more,
> And still more, later flowers for the bees,
> Until they think warm days will never cease,
> For summer has o'erbrimmed their clammy cells."

The bees, indeed, make the most of the prolonged indulgence; and not only bees but flocks of white butterflies (like scattered petals of some white flower) collect on the golden-rod.

I miss the birds, and yet more I miss their songs, as the season advances; for such as still remain about the door-yards and trees are ordinarily quite silent.

> "As Philomel in summer's front doth sing,
> And stops her pipe in growth of riper days,"

so do the feathered musicians of our acquaintance; the singing spirit has already migrated, or the vocalists seem to feel that they have exhausted their lyrical powers, and must take a vacation. So early there is suggestion of the old sentimental text respecting "last year's birds'-nests." The last broods have been reared, and whole families are now gipsying in the fields and by the small streams, enjoying themselves irresponsibly, having laid aside domestic care. The robins, in particular, flock together as though holding a perpetual granger picnic. The rare whistle of a bluebird — a skyward and vanishing sound, lost like the bird's own color in the soft autumnal blue — affects us as a momentary revisitation of spring. Perhaps the most characteristic bird-note in these days is that of the goldfinch (*Chrysomitris tristis*). The *tristis* is a touch of poetic justice, since there could be nothing more pensive and haunting, and nothing more pleasing in its pensiveness, than this quivering aspen note, which may be likened to the sound produced on a whistle when the opening is repeatedly and rapidly stopped by the finger-tips. The goldfinch's movements in air are as though

it were tossed along, now rising, now falling, with the swell and lapse of invisible waves. Its notes are uttered at each downward inflection of flight, its wings then being brought close to its sides. Despite the naturalist's *tristis*, these jet-and-gold aristocrats among finches are a very jolly company. Their gay dress, to be sure, has begun to look somewhat dingy; but that's no matter! The seediness of autumn provides their harvest-home, which they mean to make the most of, tilting among the thistles and other rusty weed-tops.

Tell it not to the farmer, publish it not in his journal of agriculture — yet it is to be feared the oriole is no better than the "little foxes that spoil the vines." Perhaps, though, the evidence I once had does not argue his being a confirmed vineyard thief. Let us give him all the benefit of the doubt. There came a rush of wings; a streak of orange-colored flame settled in the vine over my head; sharp eyes peered this way and that; discovering nobody but me, who must have looked accompliceship, the adventurer quickly thrust his long bill into the plump grapes, probing one after another with all the deftness of a humming-bird rifling a

honeysuckle. This winged, bright-eyed bacchant, drinking of the year's new wine — shall I forbid a creature like this and perhaps draw upon me the anger of its guardian deity? No; I will connive at the oriole's stolen enjoyment, even though I find suspicious puncturings in the grapes of more than one cluster. How do I know there was not intended and actual benevolence in slitting these purple-skinned wine-sacks — to the end that the bees might come by a little grape honey, without having to sting the fruit for themselves?

During the late summer and early autumn life and affairs at Chimneyburg are well worth observing. This village within a village, having a population loosely estimated at one-fourth that of the village itself, may be said to be a walled town, though on a small scale. Its houses are doubtless very densely built, with perhaps not the best advantages for lighting and ventilation, though it is true no health officer has investigated in this direction. Half the year Chimneyburg is a deserted village, the inhabitants going south in October and returning in May. During the summer occupancy it is most of the day a very quiet place, the

affairs of the citizens taking them outside the walls; but the evenings, between sunset and dusk, are given over to recreation and amusement. This is the time when the chimney-swifts (for so the walled-town tribe is called) hold a grand review or general training — an interesting sight when the young broods have joined the adults toward the end of summer. On their return at evening, the whole population, upward of five hundred (exact enumeration would be impossible) spend some time in food-gathering and promiscuous flight, after which they gradually collect in a circle or ellipse, having for its centre the old factory chimney. It is now the business of the flock to get into sleeping quarters. As all cannot enter at once, something like military stratagem must be employed. Round and round goes the chirping, fluttering company, always being diminished where the inner rank approaches the chimney, the birds dropping through the opening by twos and threes, or so rapidly as not to be counted. They fall inertly, as in a vacuum. The motion of the circle may be compared to that of a maelstrom, its vortex at the chimney; or one is reminded of grain descending through a

hopper. Sometimes a counter-current will be formed, and before one is aware the whole company will be moving in the opposite direction, perhaps to correct the giddiness acquired by circular movement. One would like to know how many revolutions had been made by those individuals last to retire. When it has grown too dusk for their motions to be easily followed, there are still a few wakeful swallows remaining outside. The very last of these darts hither and thither in a wide eccentric path, suggesting that it is in an ecstasy of delight to find itself solitary and in full possession of the emptied air. Though such late retirers, one must be early if he would witness the morning exodus of these birds. Like sparks and cinders from a chimney on fire, they dart into the daylight. It is perhaps as notable a sight as the flock of birds — whatever they were — that flew from Memnon's funeral pyre. Our chimney-dwellers are Memnon-like in their response to morning. Yet, upon one occasion at least, they were sadly disappointing in this respect, since no sooner had they made their salutations than they began a downward retreat, as though repenting their early rising.

The chimney-swallows, or swifts, are some years with us as late as mid-October, though in decimated numbers. Those delaying are, perhaps, the feeble and the injured, or else cases in which the love of locality persists. By what legerdemain do birds take themselves away in autumn? They were here but last night; this morning there is none to be seen. Why will not our friends give us the signal, so well understood among themselves? We would try to be present at their departure, no matter at what strange hour of the night or of the lonesome dawn they choose to go.

The first frost is usually so light, so soon fleeting, that none but the earliest riser sees its traces upon the grass. It only slightly freaks the leaves of those maples most susceptible of change; yet new salubrity is in the air. This gelid fire, secretly spreading by night, is kindled to chasten and purify the luxurious season; this tingling antidote, dropped in the enchanter's cup, quickly counteracts the fatal languor that but now was stealing over us. In timely frost there should be nothing to provoke melancholy reflections. As welcome as sunshine and plentiful mild rain in spring, or as the abun-

dant dews of June, is this white, granulated dew of the later year, and for this Nature seems to have been waiting with no less anticipation than for sun and showers in their season. I do not see how one bred in the North, and afterward living in tropic latitudes, could be otherwise than homesick for the flavor of frost.

But a short time since the trees were alike green. Now they are being tried, as by the touchstone, and begin to show characteristic differences. How many carats fine is the gold of the beech, the walnut, the chestnut? The oaks are red or maroon, and the maples run the whole scale of xanthic colors. As in landscape painting, this diffusion of warm hues has the effect of diminishing distance. Yonder blazing woodland, for instance, sharply contrasted with the blue of the sky, seems making for the foreground. For the eye's relief, you would fain add a little neutral tint; and you find that a hazy or humid gray atmosphere agreeably tones down the fierce coloring.

Any one who has carefully noted the autumnal traits of the maple would have no great difficulty in distinguishing among several others the leaf of any particular tree in

his neighborhood. The wind will bring me, this year as before, complimentary cards from the lemon-yellow maple; from the brindled; from the scarlet; from the scarlet-and-gold, and from the sober russet. "By these presents" I shall recognize each individual. Each remains not only loyal to the colors, but displays also the distinctive markings of previous autumns.

Falling leaves, when there is little or no wind to influence their course, have their stems vertical and foremost, spinning round and round like so many teetotums twirled in some game of invisible sprites. It is singular how soon the fallen leaf has changed its color; scarlet becoming madder, yellow a dull umber. While the leaf remains upon the tree, however it be frost-plagued, it seems to draw vital rations; once off, decay progresses rapidly. Picking up the leaf of a cottonwood growing in the yard, I am struck with the sketch I see upon it; the mid-vein and veinlets together producing a fairly accurate delineation of the tree's naked anatomy. A thousand leaves, and each bearing a small copy of the tree; each showing the inscription of its Cæsar! This fanciful principle of correspondence does not appear in

all leaves, though those of the beech and the maple somewhat illustrate it.

Unless we have an earnest desire toward frost-grapes and chestnuts, we shall not be able to prove ourselves true natives and loyal to the sweet country tradition. The sylvan table is spread, and we are awaited there. You have not forgotten, surely, the ragged gipsy vine that travels along the edge of the woods, reaching up and locking arms with the trees, whether they condescend or not? This vine, having absolutely nothing else to do, has, for purposes of sport, ripened a goodly number of fine, dark, amethystine clusters. For purposes of sport, indeed! for now it contrives so to hang those clusters among neighboring boughs that the fruit appears to belong to the tree rather than to the vine. You would say, How is this? the maple bears grapes; the hickory bears grapes; the hobble-bush and the witch-hazel bear grapes! Frost-grapes are these, and well named. A bloom like morning rime hides the purple. It may be added, the "tongue" that tastes these has a "tang."

And chestnuts — why not, by compliment, frost-nuts, since we hold ourselves indebted to the frost for opening the perilous bur?

By their growing in a bur, we may guess that Nature prizes chestnuts more than other mast, and means that they shall ripen in peace, protected from all untimely investigation. If you think to go nutting, and would at the same time avoid having company, you have not counted upon the chipmunks. They are already on the field of enterprise, vehemently asserting the priority of their claim. I am convinced they have the right on their side, else I would not have acted in their interests, as I once did, ignoring those of the youthful human. One still morning, at the height of the nutting season, as I came under the trees, I heard a great stir, seeming to proceed from something moving the fallen leaves. After some scrutiny I discovered a chipmunk rushing from side to side of an old rusty wire-trap. Its bright, wild eyes were unspeakably pathetic. No use to announce to the captive that a warrant of liberty had been issued in its behalf; I knew, as I pulled up the slide of the trap, there would be no thanks to the humble servant of the law; but I did hope to see whither the prisoner went. A bullet's course among the dry leaves could have been as easily followed with the eye. I dare say some juvenile

trapper was sadly disappointed; the chipmunk, I trust, was not too late to lay in supplies for the winter.

The "season of mists and mellow fruitfulness" has never been better painted than in the rich ode of which I have here quoted the opening line. Though breathing of the English fields and air, there is scarcely a verse of this poem which would not serve equally well in a description of our autumn. We, too, feel how the season conspires with the sun

> "To swell the gourd, and plump the hazel-shells
> With a sweet kernel:"

though, mentally, to give the picture a more familiar touch, we substitute for these the golden pumpkin and the chestnut. We, too, may have seen the spirit of the season "sitting careless on a granary floor," though not upon a "half-reaped furrow sound asleep" — not "drowsed with the fumes of poppies;" for our grain gives no ground to the poppy; but we may yet see the autumn spirit by the cider-press, with patient look watching the last oozings, hours by hours.

The bleating of full-grown lambs; the chirping of crickets; the treble soft of the redbreast (albeit not the English redbreast),

are all in the sounds of our own autumn. But the last line comes the most near: —

"And gathering swallows twitter in the skies."

Romance and reminiscence are in the air. Who has not been dreamily pleased, listening to the wind that

"Sets in with the autumn that blows from the region of stories —
Blows with a perfume of songs and of memories beloved from a boy" —

the same wind that

"Wanders on to make
That soft, uneasy sound
By distant wood and lake."

Who has not sometimes been calmed or comforted by the sight of

"autumn suns,
Smiling at eve upon the quiet sheaves."

To-night, the sun, sinking past amber-colored clouds, throwing wide shafts abroad, presented the figure of a luminous windmill, its spokes all at rest, on some breathless plain of heaven.

The falling of the leaves has always been employed as an object-lesson to illustrate man's mortality. Says Glaucus, on exchanging arms with Diomed: "Why, O son of Tydeus, do you question me about my race?

The race of men is just like the race of leaves." But it is good to hear Shelley's invocation of the West Wind: —

> "Drive my dead thoughts over the universe,
> Like withered leaves, to quicken a new birth."

The use of the leaves is not ended when they drop from the boughs. They go to make new wood-mold, but not until they have helped the children of the wood to weather the cold season.

> "I never knew before what beds,
> Fragrant to smell, and soft to touch,
> The forest sifts and shapes and spreads. . . .
>
> "Each day I find new coverlids
> Tucked in, and more sweet eyes shut tight.
> Sometimes the viewless mother bids
> Her ferns kneel down full in my sight;
> I hear their chorus of 'Good-night;'
> And half I smile, and half I weep,
> Listening while they lie down to sleep."

There was once a magician who could shelter a whole army beneath his tent, or could fold the canvas within a fan's dimension. But with summer's broad leafage and winter's close-wrapped bud, every year sees this miracle wrought.

GOSSAMER.

I HAVE made the discovery that, in addition to the Indian summer, we are favored with a gossamer summer. During this season, which includes all October and the pleasant early days of November, miles on miles of hazy filament (if it could be measured linearly) are floating about in the soft, indolent air. Especially, late in the afternoon, with a level and glowing sun, do these mysterious threads flash out along the ground, horizontally between shrubs, slantwise from grass to tree, or else cut adrift, and sailing as the wind wills. Numberless fancies, as subtle and airy-light, are suggested. What now? As the sunbeam plays along this shining length of web, and the gentle breeze gives it motion, but does not break it, might it not be taken for a sudden shaft from the golden bow of the far-darter himself; or for a string of the golden lyre, just now touched into toneless melody; a fairy telegraph line, flashing with its electric mes-

sage; a zigzag of harmless heat-lightning? Here a glistening clew has been dipped in the color fount of Iris, — may even be a stray raveling from the fringes of some cast-away rainbow. It shows the same prismatic changes that are seen in the wing tissue of the locust or the dragon-fly. Now the lazy wind wafts this way the tangled cordage and tackle of an air-ship, whose sails, deck, and hull are invisible, — said to be a pleasure yacht carrying a company of sylphs and sylphids, the *beau monde* of the air.

It takes nothing from the poetry that lies in the weft of the gossamer when it is known to be the work of an unconsidered spider, and that it serves some practical purpose (not yet satisfactorily explained) of the producer. By some it is claimed that this floating web is not spread with predacious intent, but rather as a means of aerial navigation; indeed, these vague and indeterminate threads would hardly disturb a gnats' cotillon, if blown in their path. Hitherto we have regarded the spider as an humble, plodding creature of the earth, an unaspiring, stay-at-home citizen, but this new aeronautic hypothesis hints that the poor insect is a very transcendentalist, an ideal voyager. Its

journey may not be as sublime as the flight of the skylark, but it is not a whit less witching and elusive. It seems scarcely credible that this sailing spider should be able, as some have supposed, to direct the course of its filmy parachute, having neither rudder, ballast, nor canvas. Doubtless, the wind often carries up both web and weaver, the latter in the predicament of a balloonist clinging to the ropes of his runaway car. Some naturalists assert that the gossamer spider instinctively takes advantage of the levity of the atmosphere, thrusting out its threads until they reach a current of warmer and rarer air, which draws them upward, the spider going along with the uncompleted web. Whether it is capable of cutting short its journey and casting anchor at pleasure is indeed questionable.

However, it would seem that there are acrobatic or leaping spiders, that use their webs as buoys in traversing short distances by air; else, how come those fine gluey flosses morning and evening, stretched straight as a surveyor's line between neighboring trees? It is not likely that the spider, after fastening its clew in one tree, descended and reached the other terminus by

a tedious detour along the ground. It must have bridged the intervening space by some rapid and dexterous method, to which the exploits of a Sam Patch or a Blondin were absolutely tame and ventureless. If it could be proven that this sagacious insect is really possessed of navigating instinct and habits, why not suppose it extends its journeys, traveling from one latitude to another? Those phantom navies of the gossamer summer sky were perhaps going the same way as the autumn birds of passage. Are Spiders Migratory in their Habits? may, at some future time, be the subject of serious inquiry and discussion. I was never in luck to find the gossamer weaver at home from its voyages, but more than once have "spoken" its craft on the high sea, and received serviceable weather hints. Even in midwinter I have seen occasional shimmering filaments among the dry twigs and grasses, but could never decide whether they were the fresh work of some enterprising spider, tempted out by a brief "spell o' sunshine," or merely the remnants of last autumn's spinning, unaccountably spared by the besom of the wind.

It has been suggested that the thick webs which are spread over the fields on a sum-

mer morning are there produced for the purpose of collecting the moisture that falls during the night. This theory is sustained by the known fact, that the spider is an extremely thirsty creature. Is the spider, then, a disciple of hydropathy as well as an experimenter in aeronautics?

The poets have not, usually, condescended to take much notice of the spider, though mythology (which is a kind of anonymous poetry received from the ancients) relates how a young lady of Lydia impiously invited Pallas to try a spinning race with her; and how, on being vanquished by the immortal spinster of Olympus, the poor foolish girl was about to hang herself in a rope of her own twisting, when lo! she was changed into a spider, in which humble and despised shape she remains to this day. Gavin Douglas, the "Scottish Chaucer," in his description of a May morning, does not forget to mention that —

> "In corners and clear fenestres of glass,
> Full busily *Arachne* weavand was
> To knit her nettes and her webbes slie,
> Therewith to catch the little midge or flie."

The poetic and nimble-tongued Mercutio tells us that the wagon-spokes of fairy Mab's chariot are

"made of long spinners' legs,
The cover of the wings of grasshoppers,
The traces of the very smallest spider's web," etc.

Nor must we forget the obliging Cavalero Cobweb, one of the elfin gentlemen whom Titania posted to wait on the wants of her long-eared lover: "Monsieur Cobweb, good Monsieur Cobweb, get your weapons in your hand, and kill me a red-hipped humble-bee on the top of a thistle; and, good Monsieur Cobweb, bring me the honey-bag."

THISTLE-DOWN AND SILVER-ROD.

A CERTAIN not uncommon, but for obvious reasons seldom gathered, flower of the field and wayside possesses for me a singular attraction. It commands my admiration even in its tender infancy, then a little rosette-like emerald patch on the old turf, — a kind of Legion of Honor decoration worn by the veteran field. At this stage of its existence I touch its leaves with something of the feeling I should have if playing with the leopard's kitten. By and by, it is "Hands off!" or, "Touch me at your peril!" free and blunt translation of the legend which the Scottish king stamped upon his coinage (Nemo me impune lacessit). But I love the thistle none the less for its truculent defiance. I am tempted to gather the flower and wear it, as one might snatch a sweetheart across feudal barriers, or run away with the lovely daughter of a savage sachem. The blossom itself — its purple heart of

hearts — is all delicacy and suavity; a honey-sweet aura breathes therefrom. I ask, How long since the bumble-bee was here? for I can never decide whether it is the thistle blossom that smells of the bumble-bee, or the bumble-bee of the thistle blossom, each suggesting the peculiar redolence of the other.

In some respects the thistle prepares a Barmecide's feast for my eyes. The large bowl-like calyx looks as though it might be ripening a luscious fruit, to correspond with the ambrosial purple of the flower; (figs from thistles!) also, the involucre being set with spines, I am reminded of the chestnut burr, and am half persuaded to look within for an edible kernel.

The thistle is an idealist among plants. Its dreams would be worth recording. Anon you shall see that it was never content with tenure of the earth alone, but it had also its designs upon the kingdom of the air. When its season of bloom is past, its leaf-lances rusted and broken; when, seemingly, its fortunes are at lowest ebb, then look out for the shining fleets of its seeds. Through all the fine weather of autumn, these cruise about, above the fields, over the village

streets, even entering the houses through open doors and windows. (Once, indeed, a thistle-ball allowed its filmy asterisk for a moment to rest opposite the last sentence of the page I was writing, — a flattery which I was not slow to seize upon and enjoy.) "Have you seen the thistle-down, this morning?" I am on the point of asking the neighbors, since, in my observation, nothing is "going on about town" to match the solemn, deliberate enterprise of these sailing spheres. Each, perhaps, has its guiding spirit, its Uriel, and is steered hither or thither at pleasure. I almost forget that the delicate traveler had its origin from the earth. How would this do, poet, for your coat of arms: Thistle-ball, argent, volant, on a field azure; motto, *semper errans!*

The days of the thistle-down fleet are those of the white butterfly also. Wherever you may look, one or the other is always crossing the path of vision. A white butterfly met a thistle-ball on the airy highway. Expressions of mutual surprise were exchanged. "Halloo! I thought you were one of us," said the butterfly. "And I," returned the thistle-ball, "took you for a white pea-blossom."

On goes the winged hope of the thistle; flashing-white in the sunshine, but dark at night, when its little globe is seen gliding across the disk of the moon. Peradventure, some of these voyaging seeds never return to earth. What shall I say, but that I suspect the thistle flourishes in heaven! There, divested of its irritability, etherealized, having in truth become a Blessed Thistle, it grows innocently by all the celestial waysides, is hummed about by the bumble-bee and lisped over by the goldfinch, — for these, too, have been translated.

As a rule, the floral necropolis styled herbarium is to me the least interesting of scientific collections: I have no more use for the dead peers of flowerdom lying in faded state than I have for mummified Egyptian royalty. But I would make an exception to the rule, remembering that there is one dry garden which never fails to offer instruction and enjoyment. This garden rambles widely, including wood borders, pastures, and streamsides. The plants with which it is adorned are either dead or dying, yet it is not easy to regard them merely as dried specimens; on the contrary, they are scarcely less beautiful than when they moved in the train of the

varicolored and Sybaritic summer. Foremost in this wild herbarium stands Silver-Rod. Who knows not Silver-Rod, the lovely and reverend old age of Golden-Rod, — else Golden-Rod beatified and sainted, looking moonlit and misty even in the sunshine! In this soft, canescent after-bloom, beginning at the apex of the flower cluster and gradually spreading downward, the eye finds an agreeable relief from the recent dazzle of yellow splendor. I almost forget that the herb is not literally in bloom, that it is no longer ministered to by sunshine and dew. Is there not, perhaps, some kind of bee that loves to work among these plumy blossoms, gathering a concentrated form of nectar, pulverulent *flower* of honey? I gently stir this tufted staff, and away floats a little cloud of pappus, in which I recognize the golden and silver-rods of another year, if the feathery seeds shall find hospitable lodgment in the earth. Two other plants in the wild herbarium deserve to be ranked with my subject, for the grace and dignity with which they wear their seedy fortunes: iron-weed, with its pretty, daisy-shaped involucres; and life-everlasting, which, having provided its own cerements and spices, now rests em-

balmed in all the pastures; it is still pleasantly odorous, and, as often as I meet it, puts me in mind of an old-fashioned verse which speaks of the "actions of the just" and their lasting bloom and sweetness. On a chill November day I fancy that the air is a little softer in places where Silver-Rod holds sway, and that there spirits of peace and patience have their special haunts; also, passing my thoughts under that rod for discipline, I record a gain in content and serenity.

WHERE IT LISTETH.

THERE is, on a certain sylvan estate of my thought, a little area where only the anemone grows, year after year holding the ground in undisturbed tenure. Whenever the wind blows, though never so rudely, bloom runs rife over the anemone bank; then I mark a swift unfolding and buoyant stirring of petals on which the sun shone and the rain dropped gentle persuasion in vain. I gather at random a handful of these blossoms, well pleased if any lover of the wild-garden recognize a familiar species.

I remember a kinship we have with the wind: *Anima*, the wind; also the breath or life of man. Sometimes, on a listless summer day, a sudden gust sweeps the dust of the road into vertical form, bears it along for a few seconds, then mysteriously disperses it. When this happens, it seems to me that I have seen a vague type or semblance of humanity, — dust and spirit imperfectly compounded, by some unimagina-

ble ambition in the earthy atoms goaded into momentary, troubled activity.

Air in motion, says the old standing definition. The sailor, who surely should know best, recognizes twelve phases of the wind, of which the first in the series is called "faint air," the last "storm." Science informs us as to the traveling record made by each: the hurricane's speed ranges from eighty to one hundred miles an hour, while even gentle air, whose rate is but seven miles an hour, more than keeps up with your average roadster.

Elizabethan Davies, whose verse has a touch both of the savant and the transcendentalist, inquires, —

> "Lastly, where keep the Winds their revelry,
> Their violent turnings, and wild whirling hays,
> But in the Air's translucent gallery?
> Where she herself is turned a hundred ways
> While with those maskers wantonly she plays."

We may thank what we call "poetic license" for the permission it gives us to make the vowel long in the word "wīnd:" this pronunciation admirably preserves the prime idea of the sinuous and subtle force exerted by the wandering air. Homer mentions a river, called Ocean, encircling the

earth. The true Ocean River, — what is it but the mad stream of the winds forever beating the terrestrial shore? Homer's epithets descriptive of the sea instantly come into the mind: the wind, too, is an earth-shaker, is many-sounding; full of sea tones, hungry-voiced as the sea itself. Here its current may be running with halcyon smoothness, spreading out in a gentle lake or pool of despond; elsewhere, at the same moment, it courses in rapids, spins cyclones, and buffets the heavens with its huge billows. It may almost be said to have its tides, like the sea; to encroach upon one coast, eroding it by stealthy pinches, while it temporarily builds up another. This upper ocean stream moulds as it will the under watery plain, and its crafty deity completely overrules the bulky Neptune.

Upon sand and snow the wind leaves an imprint of its wave-like motion, with record of the direction in which it traveled. This invisible swift stream furrows the level snow, and carves a drift as a river does its banks. I almost forget that the wind is not palpable to the eye, so evident is the motion which it everywhere imparts. As a medium of expression, a deep meadow in the month

of June will do. Once walking along the edge of such a field, I experienced a slight giddiness, as though I had been looking down on water from a ship's deck. As the fresh breeze swept over the luxuriant meadow, the long swell and endless succession of waves seemed to me excellent counterfeit of the sea's surging; even spray was not lacking, for such I counted the gray bloom of the grass marking the crest of each wave. The birds that flew over the field, or dipped under its blossom-spray, by an easy hyperbole of vision, became sea-birds, and something in their free, abandoned flight gave the fancy countenance. When I hear the wind in the tops of great trees, my first impression is that if I look up I shall see its strong current drawing through them, and, far above their leafy periphery, the broken crests and white caps of the airy sea, — flecks of light, detached cloud driving on or past some shrouded island or main shore, cloud also, but denser, and slower in its drifting. As a child, I thought the stars and the wind were associated; the higher the wind, the brighter shone the stars. Still, on a breezy night, I find it easy to imagine that their brilliance comes and goes with

the wind, like so many bickering flames of torch or candle.

As a description of the long flow and refluence of the wind, the air's voice with the circumflex accent, I know of no combination of words surpassing in beauty this passage from Hyperion: —

> "As when, upon a tranced summer night,
> Those green-robed senators of mighty woods,
> Tall oaks, branch-charmed by the earnest stars,
> Dream, and so dream all night without a stir,
> Save from one gradual solitary gust
> Which comes upon the silence, and dies off,
> As if the ebbing air had but one wave."

This is the breathing of enchanted solitude, but immeasurable desolation finds a voice in these lines from Morte d'Arthur: —

> "An agony
> Of lamentation, like the wind, that shrills
> All night in a waste land where no one comes,
> Or hath come, since the making of the world."

The tumult of sound, half heroic prophesying, half mournful reminiscence, that runs through the forest roof at the beginning of a storm is heard in the following: —

> "A wind arose and rush'd upon the South,
> And shook the songs, the whispers, and the shrieks
> Of the wild woods together."

Something stormy in the soul rises to

applaud the storm without, and cheer on the combatants, with a "Blow, blow, thou winter wind," or a "Blow, wind, and crack your cheeks! rage! blow!" As I listen, on a December night, to this traveler from the uttermost west, — whose wing, for aught I know, carries siftings from the old snow of Mount Hood or St. Helen, — I am put in mind, now of the claps and shocks of great sea waves, of the panting breath of wild herds driven by prairie fire, of the whizzing of legion arrows; but softly! now, by a magical decrescendo, the sound is reported to my ear as merely a mighty rustling of silken garments, — audible proof of invisible *éclat* at this state levee of the elements. I know how the trees thrill with excitement, swaying to and fro and nodding deliriously, as though the tunes of Amphion were even now tickling their sense for music and dancing. Especially I figure the ecstasy of the pine and the hemlock, whose rocking motion suggests that of a skiff moored in unquiet waters: they would perhaps like to snap their rooty cables, and go reeling away on the vast wind-sea! If there is anything in heredity, the pine-tree must have an instinct for maritime life; so, I fancy, it foresees and sings a time

when it shall become the "mast of some tall ammiral."

Each wind has its own weather significance quite constant in value. "When ye see a cloud rise out of the west, straightway ye say, There cometh a shower; and so it is. And when ye see the south wind blow, ye say, There will be heat; and it cometh to pass," — prognostics that still hold good. The world around, the east wind is known as a malicious dispenser both of physical and spiritual ill. Beyond question, he would be hailed as the benefactor of his race who should invent some method of hermetically sealing the east wind; yet, could this be done, immediately some one of the other three would undertake the discharge of its suppressed neighbor's duties. It is said that at Buenos Ayres the wind from the north is the most dreaded. During its continuance, citizens who are compelled to be out-of-doors wear split beans upon their temples to relieve the headache which it causes, and a special increase of crime is noted.

Why does the world's literature teem with fond reference to the south and the south wind's amenity? The poets are all in the northern hemisphere! Had there been

bards in Patagonia and New Zealand, it is safe to say that the balmy north wind would have wandered through the gardens of their rhetoric, or the nipping and eager south wind would have scathed their flowers. Who is quite able to fancy that the weather of the South Pole is every whit as frosty as that of the North?

Formerly the winds were thought to be amenable to the will of magicians, or of other mortals superhumanly favored. Not to go back so far as Æolus Hippotades and his gifts to Ulysses, we may find in "The Anatomy of Melancholy" an interesting account of a certain king of Sweden, who had an "enchanted cap, by virtue of which, and some magical murmur or whispering terms, he could command spirits, trouble the air, and make the wind stand which way he would; insomuch that when there was any great wind or storm the common people were wont to say the king now had on his conjuring cap." Once the credulous vanity of man could be persuaded that the elements were agitated at the approach of calamity to himself. On the 19th of May, 1663, Sir Samuel Pepys made the following entry in his immortal Diary: "Waked with a very

high wind, and said to my wife, 'I pray God I hear not the death of any great person, this wind is so high!' fearing that the queen might be dead. So up and by coach to St. James's, and hear that Sir W. Compton died yesterday." It would be edifying to know something more about the wind-gauge used by old Pepys in making his necrological calculations; for instance, the exact volume of disturbed air corresponding with the demise of a person in any given rank of the nobility. Presumably, an English yeoman might have died, and not so much as a zephyr have troubled the good old chronicler's slumbers with intelligence of the fact.

The *idle* wind? How so sure that it is idle? Though it pipes in the key-hole and soughs in the boughs of the roof-tree, that is not its main employ. The brown-studying mortal, who hums or whistles a tune while engaged with the solution of some vast mechanical or ideal problem, I should not call idle. Because I am unadvised of its affairs, shall I presume to call the west wind a vagrant?

Though I lack the conjuring cap, as also knowledge of the whispering terms by means of which I could make the wind stand ac-

cording to my pleasure, perhaps I can induce it to do me a good turn. Given a small crevice between the two sashes of a window; a couple of wedges (of pine let them be); a waxed thread of silk stretched between them in the crevice, through which the stream of the wind glides, as water in a race to serve some skillful enterprise of man: and now I have a musical instrument, simpler in its construction, and yet not unlike that from which "the God of winds drew sounds of deep delight," to charm the dwellers of Castle Indolence. It is pleasing to know that the last of the minstrels still lives, and may be won to come and play at your casement, if you will but provide a harp for his use. As soon as the thread is stretched in the crevice, and the wind comes upon it, I seem to listen to the smooth continuation of an old-time or old-eternity music which I have not heard before, only because my ear lacked the true sense of hearing. The wind bloweth where it listeth; and these sounds, breathed through a trivial instrument, are always coming and going between earth and heaven, free, elemental, mysterious, born of a spirit unsearchable. Yet they seem to admit of human interpretation, and I hear in

them both requiem and jubilate, the canticle of comforted sorrow and the voice of hope. Sometimes, with the ebbing of the wind, a cadence just fails of completion, — like a bright gossamer, that, running through the sunshine, presently dips into shade and becomes invisible. But the inner ear keeps a vibration, and imagination fills up the interval until the wind returns. Then I prove that

> "Heard melodies are sweet, but those unheard
> Are sweeter."

This harp of the wind is also, by turns, flute and shrill fife, silver bells and the "horns of elfland faintly blowing." Occasionally it emits a strain of exquisite purity, resembling the highest and clearest of violin tones prolonged under the bow of a master. The minstrel strikes many varying notes of the music of nature, — the faint tinkling of a small brook, the far-away cheer of migrating birds, the summer-afternoon droning of bees in the hive, and even the guttural tremolo of frogs heard in the distance. Under a sudden violent stress of the wind the strings of the harp (for I sometimes add a second string) shriek with dissonant agony. Each discordant sound, I imagine, is but the

strayed and mismated fragment of some harmonious whole, of which nothing now remains except this solitary wandering clamor. All these remnants of wrecked musical unities, perhaps forced together by secret compulsion, seem bewailing in unknown tongues their perpetual alienation from harmony. Of such character might all discord be said to be.

Following the slim thread of this Æolian rivulet I find the way to sleep. My dreams are mingled and tempered sweetly by the bland spirit of the harp, that through the dark, oblivious hours plays on, unweaving all evil spells of the night.

> "Be not afeard; the isle is full of noises,
> Sounds, and sweet airs that give delight and hurt not.
> Sometimes a thousand twangling instruments
> Will hum about mine ears; and sometimes voices,
> That, if I then had waked after long sleep,
> Will make me sleep again."

To which may be added the pleasant consideration that I "have my music for nothing."

EMBER DAYS.

Not the specified Wednesdays, Fridays, and Saturdays of ecclesiastical observance. The Ember Days we note date back of any calendar, Christian or Pagan. They are ushered in by a series of brief-lighted, half-hearted, jaundiced days, post-autumnal in their temper, and yet not due winter. The fire of the year slowly smoulders out, dropping into corroded brands and ashes on the earth, and escaping upwards in smoke and vapor of fog. The vital spark in man's heart and brain suffers by sympathy with the season, and needs some fanning to keep it in genial play. Premonitions of winter sleep steal over us, urging the propriety of looking about for a snug *hibernaculum*. The Muse has nothing to say, unless to clap approval at the sentiment pronounced by the pleasant balladist: —

"When the ways are heavy with mire and rut,
In November fogs, in December snows;
When the north wind howls, and the doors are shut,
There is place, and enough, for the pains of prose!"

To distinguish the month of November, we would call it a *mélange* of all ill weathers. It contains days borrowed from February and March, days of fickle variety, like a shrewd and imbittered April. By the falling of the leaves, after much miserable temporizing, we are brought face to face with the austere heavens and a long reckoning of inclemencies. This is the November which some one has rightly named "Eat-heart."

It is wonderful how the grass contrives to double the season. It has two spring-times, and grows bravely up to the very threshold of winter, both on the vernal and autumnal side. In some places, it may have communicated its courageous spirit to neighboring plants. This November blue violet, does it not sweetly and acceptably apologize for the absence of blue overhead? Here and there the dandelion still contributes its pennyworth of sunshine. These signs of nature's vernal feeling in the dead of the year affect us with some such surprise as we have at seeing the summer-time constellations rising before dawn of a winter day. But the pushing thriftiness of the grass cannot mask the prevailing soberness of the season. In pastures, and about the fence corners, weeds of

rank flowerage during the autumn now stand with hoary or black tops, like a row of snuffed-out candles, once used for an illumination. Here is the milkweed, with its pods set so as to represent a bevy of birds; but the wind is plucking off their silken white plumage, and sending it wastefully adrift through the field. Here, a shabby thistle is putting out a last purple pretense of decayed royalty. "Poverty grass," with its straight, wispy bents, bleached white, and standing in even parallels, looks like the threads of a warp in the loom. But there is not so much as a spider to put in a gossamer filling. I sometimes hear a faint, thin note in the grass, much like the rattling of small seeds in a dry husk: this, I fancy, may be the lay of the last cricket, Once in a long interval, my foot starts up a decrepit grasshopper, frost-bitten and rheumatic, — possibly the old immortal Tithonus of the fable. Here a puff-ball, grown to prodigious size, and torn or burst open at the top, is sifting its fine, snuff-colored dust into the wind. It suggests *diablerie;* indeed, the brown elves must use it as a censer in their unhallowed midnight incantations. Weird and eldritch suggestions are plenty on every side. If you

walk in the woods, you are startled by mysterious small sounds, — Panic noises, which you cannot readily trace to an origin. That old rustic practical joker, who in his day has frightened so many a solitary traveler, was never more alive and maliciously inventive than now. He it is, undoubtedly, who sends the partridge detonating through the dry leaves directly in our path; who sets the woodpecker to dispatching telegraphic messages, with a hollow tap, tap, on some sonorous trunk close by; who makes the trees groan humanly among their upper branches, and the dry leaves on the scrub oak discourse gibberish. Sometimes, where the fallen leaves are glued together with mildew, one detaches itself from the sodden company, and turns deliberately over, with a beckoning motion. Then I see the brown, charm-weaving hand of some ancient earth sibyl. On a hard-bound December evening, the low, faint shudder running through the crisp leaves and grasses brings to mind a certain awesome scripture: "Thou shalt be brought down, and shalt speak out of the ground, and thy speech shall be low out of the dust, and thy voice shall be, as of one that hath a familiar spirit, out of the ground, and thy speech shall whisper out of the dust."

I notice that a white bloom has gathered on the raspberry briers, modifying their burnt-sienna color to a delicate flesh-tint; indeed, it would seem that all vegetable life, designing to brave the winter through, had grown, for that purpose, a kind of tough, unsensitive scarf-skin. Even the trees appear to have gained a thicker rind, and their upper branches and whole stem system look, in the sunshine, as though they had been brushed over with some preservative lubricant or varnish. On every hand, Nature strengthens her position, or, if forced to yield ground, covers safely her retreat. Let none be uneasy on her account. "Young buds sleep at the root's white core," and the future leaf rocks securely in its cradle on the tree-top. Now, before the deep snow flings to the door, I would like to visit the winter dormitory of every hibernating creature, — would follow home the chipmunk which I caught yesterday filling his impudent cheeks with corn from the crib; I have a natural curiosity to know how *his* granary is planned. What lodgings have been engaged by the bull-frog and his mellower-voiced rival, the hyla? Are there any "birds of a feather" tumbled together at the bottom of some old

chestnut stump, for the astonished farmer to exhume about Candlemas Day? Above all, I would like to know whether there are any swallows done up in clay at the bed of the stream, as White of Selborne was so desirous of proving, some time ago; and whether the cricket has laid in a good supply of fodder, or merely chews over his summer cud. I am the more concerned to push investigation in this quarter since I have read that the insect has the same number and arrangement of stomachs enjoyed by the Order Ruminantia!

Frequently, in the early morning, at this time of the year, one hears the high, shrill clamor of the blue jay, spreading his wings on the stream of the north wind and crying a defiance; it is the very voice of winter. Until late in the season, and occasionally during the milder winter weather, I hear the coarse guffaw of the crow at a long distance through the woods. Is there not a true sardonic inflection in the note of the crow? What lazy contempt and derision it expresses! He is called Jaques, in our Forest of Arden. How ridiculously he caricatures the gait of human kind. I remember to have seen a man chasing a lamed crow

over a plowed field, and to have been impressed by the ludicrous similarity of their motions. The black-coated man, by a ruse of fancy, became a larger species of crow, while his corvine thiefship appeared as a smart little personage in black broadcloth.

It is worthy of remark that each bird-voice is by us mentally referred to some particular season or date in the year. The apple-blossom and the oriole are as indissolubly wedded as are the rose and the nightingale in poetic tradition; the chipping-bird's rapid trill is hot weather vocalized; the pewee's note belongs to the somnolent depths of the summer; and for years, as it seems to me, a solitary killdeer, on its vernal migration, has kept its appointment on a certain mild Sabbath day of March, sounding its hasty, querulous cry as it passes over the village. As the soft aerial whistle of the bluebird (no matter in what season we hear it) wakes spring in the heart, so on hearing the chickadee the air swarms with snowflakes, the trees stand stark and bare, and icicles trim the eaves — in fancy's perspective. He affects to resent our intrusion upon his woodland territory. He and his comrade black-caps come down into the

lower branches and begin their crisp interrogations, "Dee! dee! dee!" which I interpret thus: "Quick! make known your business here!" promising all the rigors of their Liliputian law if our explanations should not be satisfactory. I am acquainted with a youthful archer who is ambitious to make a mark of the chickadee. "Why, what have you got against our friend?" I ask. "Don't like his brag," is the laconic reply. But the chickadee has other notes at his command besides the one from which his familiar name is derived. To the sylvan lodge by Walden Pond the chickadee was wont to come "with faint, flitting, lisping notes, like the tinkling of icicles in the grass, or else with sprightly *day*, *day*, *day*, or more rarely, in springlike days, a wiry, summery *phe-be* from the woodside." It is amusing to watch his calisthenic practice as he lights, for a moment, upon some swinging branch. One is reminded of the grotesque motions of a parrot. Or, as he arches his fine neck and curbs in his head, I am tempted to compare small things to great — to call him a spirited little war-steed of the air. His flight is a succession of curvets, or leaps, as though his body were elastic, and rebounded as

often as it smote the air. His oddly marked plumage suggests to me that here is a fantastic masker just come from some carnival frolic of the feathered *beau monde*. With the chickadee comes the nuthatch. For the latter the school-boy has a name ready fitted, derived from the bird's most characteristic note. "We call 'em *yaks*," said the disciple of Robin Hood whom I have before mentioned. Besides the *yah*, *yah* (or *yak*), of this note, expressive of irony and petulance quite at variance with the demure and gentle behavior of this bird, the nuthatch has another idiom. When, with a comrade or two, he is making the tour of a tree-trunk, in quest of insect food, he converses in fine, confidential, mouselike squeaks, which a listener finds decidedly humorous. The nuthatch is said to be in the habit of cracking nuts by wedging them into some convenient crevice and then hammering them with his bill; whence the name. In searching for insects lodged in the bark of trees, the nuthatch is able to descend the trunk with head downward, an accomplishment which distinguishes our interesting friend from all other birds that earn a livelihood by wood-pecking. Though not possessing the chickadee's in-

quisitive loquacity, the nuthatch is scarcely less fearless and familiar. I have sometimes imagined that he is not without a fine sense of humor and a *penchant* for jesting. Once or twice I have engaged him in a game of "bo-peep" (for I thus construed our mutual positions and manœuvres). Nuthatch upon one side of the tree, I on the other; I think to move cautiously around until I have the nuthatch in sight, but the nuthatch shifts his position, little by little; and this is repeated until we have made the circuit of the tree. Meanwhile I have had only the merest glimpses of his bill and mischievous eye. Though I suppose this brave child of winter cares not a grub for compliments of any sort, I have thought of posting the following lines upon some tree where he would be apt to come upon them in his daily avocations: —

TO A NUTHATCH.

Shrewd little haunter of woods all gray,
Whom I meet on my walk, of a winter day,
You 're busy inspecting each cranny and hole
In the ragged bark of yon hickory bole;
You intent on your task, and I on the law
Of your wonderful head and gymnast claw!
The woodpecker well may despair of this feat —
Only the fly with you can compete!

So much is clear; but I fain would know
How you so reckless, and fearless go,
Head upward, head downward, all one to you,
Zenith or nadir the same in your view!
Perhaps you would answer (with wisdom true)
"Why do you wonder? You mortals too,
All, in the whirl of the day and the night,
Change nether deep for ether height."

Each spring, I am grieved to note the inroad that has been made upon the timber during the fall and winter previous. It seems to me that the nobility is first to go, and I wonder how it is that the woodman's axe refuses to taste of aught less than the fairest and tallest-grown of the forest. Is there no penalty attached to *arboricide?* If I were in the chopper's place, I should fear that Sylvan would hurl the falling shaft my way, and crush me beneath it. Down go the beech, the oak, and the ash; down goes the maple, notwithstanding its veins of kindness. The ground is scattered over with splinters and chips, white or pinkish, clean and sweet-smelling. What further destiny is in store for this deposed and mutilated majesty? The oracle of Dodona could not have foretold. Part, sound sleepers under the tracks of the last new railway; part to be floated down the Lakes, out through the Gulf of St.

Lawrence, and over the "road of the bold" to England; part to remain here, and become a patient power in the lands, converted to tools in the hands of the farmer; still another part to be consumed on our hearths, — an extravagant and guilty luxury, we are inclined to think. Occasionally the axe discloses the fact that a great and flourishing tree was quite corrupt at the core; that it lived for years with a heart of sawdust. Nature has her laugh at us, and propounds the following: Pray, how will this fact fit into your object-lessons, my little philosopher? Will you teach your pupils that even from hearts unsound right growths may sometimes proceed? But when we have wrinkled our brows over the embarrassing problem long enough, she will tell us, most likely, that a tree's heart is where a man's heart should be, all abroad in free circulation, in branches, stems, and leaves, — in radiating sympathies and enthusiasm, if we look upon the human side of the question. He has hardly become acquainted with the whole tree who has known it only in its summer phases. He is no true lover of the woods who ceases to go to them when the leaves have dropped away, and the garrulous dryad

has retired to sleep. I would know my friends in their adversity and hardihood. Some invaluable intimations are reached down on that lichened north or northeast side of a sage, weather-beaten old tree, which looks so much alive that one might expect to find it as vocal as the trees in Dante's mournful forest, — only if one should cut the bark or break a branch, one would not hear groans and outcries, but the overflow of continual good spirits and complaisance! To him who enjoys their winter society each tree of the forest has its distinct individuality, no less now than when it flourished under the sign of the leaf. There are all degrees of muscularity, all shades between grayness and brownness, besides delicate differences in pose and deportment, to pronounce the tree. This is the "builder oak," that throws such energy into its strong, upreaching arms; this, the beech, distinguished by the lateral precision of its branches; this, the soft maple, recognizable by its poised lightness and round contour. Who knows not the "vine-prop" elm, with its lofty grace and slight benedictive droop, the oriole's nest still swinging from the end of some branch? Bring us the nest of the bird, and we will

do our best to tell you what tree afforded the site. We dare to do this, because we chanced, last spring, to be present at a congress convened by the birds, to discuss the comparative advantages for nest-building presented by various trees. The smooth, gray stem of the beech looks not unlike an old church-yard slab, with here and there a frill of lichen, or a patch of moss. The bark of the cucumber-tree is arranged in fine scales, as though the tree had put on an hibernal coat of mail, while that of the white ash suggests pigeon tracks in wet clay, the tracks pointing up the stem. "The Dorian column of the sycamore" stands out in white relief against the dark background of the deeper woods. This tree casts its bark as well as its leaves. Are you a skilled archæologist? Read what is written on that scrap of parchment, — a true Saxon book, direct from the bark of the tree. It is thought to contain the tree's esoteric doctrines, its notes and comments, thrown off in its summer leisure. Even the pine and the hemlock are deciduous, though they manage to shift the old garment for the new so adroitly that none of their neighbors discover the sleight.

The west wind, in summer time a deli-

cious boon, becomes at this season a scourge, with a threefold lash of sleet, hail, and snow; for the most of our heavy winter storms rise from this quarter. Our trees have wrestled so long with this wind that they are permanently warped towards the east, as may be seen by running the eye over their profiles; there is even a perceptible scantiness in the growth of their branches on the side exposed to the prevailing wind. What mighty battles have I seen and heard waged between the trees and the west wind, — an Iliad fought in fields of the air. I cannot understand, when I hear the wind characterized as "lonesome" and "melancholy." It is the great traveler, who not only has been around the earth, but has circumnavigated some of the nearer stars, returning with a traveler's zest for story-telling. There is heraldry in the wind, mysterious errantry. It is possible that our snow-topped pine, gently nodding to its black shadow in the moonlight, has just received advices from that tropical palm, its legendary love. A high wind calls the imagination to come up higher. What has the poet of nature to do with the island valley of Avilion, — with a region

> "Where falls not hail, or rain, or any snow,
> Nor ever wind blows loudly"?

If we have neither mountains, trees, streams, nor the sea in our prospect, we have at least the sky and the wind: the one, with its clouds, to paint pictures for us, the other to sing us songs.

The morning was bound in blue and gold. Wherever the long shafts of the sun fell, a gold-stone sparkle followed; but the shadows had the tint of the lilac, or of an aerified amethyst. The children of Aurora perceived that manna had fallen in the night, and went forth to gather it; but they wisely carried neither scrip nor basket, knowing they could lay none by for the morrow. In May we indeed believed, with the Rosicrucians, that there might be an immortal virtue in May-dew; in December we discover it is lodged in the *frost*. Every blade of grass is shot full of minute crystalline arrow-heads, which might be drawn out entire, could there be found for the task a hand of sufficient coldness and delicacy. In this smooth, frozen ground are seen numerous fine, branching lines, which suggest a tracery of some straggling lycopodium, or that a clumsy Gothic artisan has attempted to

draw on an earthy tablet certain theorems in Crystallization — else that sachem, Frost, and his band made it their amusement, while the clay was still soft, to hack it with their tomahawks. Inside the well-curb flourishes a garden of colorless lichens and mosses, of various coralline and arborescent patterns; hardy, save under the rays of the sun. On first waking we drew aside the curtain, and found on the window-pane a glorious emblazonry of summer trees, flowers, and tangled thickets. How was this? Had we dreamed of summer? And then, did the spirit of cold and the breath of a sleeper convey the phantasmal dream to the pane, and there leave it to crystallize under the keen surveillance of the stars? I was shown the photograph of a singularly beautiful frost-piece, and required to name the original. Before I hit the truth, I was successively reminded of a fern plot in the woods, a garden of deep-sea plants, and an imprint of fossil vegetation. This seemed to me additional proof that Nature has only a few fine forms, which she works over and over, with unwearying delight. We read that a whole tropical flora lies buried under the Greenland glacier. It is this fact, perhaps,

that is whitely hinted at in all the works of the frost. Living not far from a great lake, locked in its winter sleep, I sometimes fall into the impression that our coast line runs coincident with the arctic circle, and that Wrangel Land, and the icy mausoleum of so much brave polar research, might be reached by an hour's journey due northward. Yonder is the frozen deep; for aught I know, it is the limit of discovery. Instead of the "unmeasured laughter of the waves," there is dead silence, or only the astonished whistle of the north wind, as it sweeps over surges it cannot drive, — "white caps" that sparkle, but are without power to burst into spray. The voicelessness of the lake is the first impression obtained; the next is of the vast sunken perspective it presents. It vividly suggests the crater of a burnt-out volcano. Frequent drifts of snow and caked ice, mixed with sand sifted in from the beach, answer to the lava and ashes of bygone volcanic eruptions. If the lake has frozen under a stiff norther, our beach will be filled with a wild arabesque architecture. Here are ice-caves and narrow cloister walks, niches and shrines; and here (by a bold upward fling of the tor-

tured water in freezing) is a veritable wigwam, a piece of poetic justice in the elements, commemorating the far-away Indian occupancy of the shore. In the offing there will be one or more jagged ramparts of ice, and beyond, at the furthest reach of the eye, a dark, steel-blue hint of free waters, though frequently no such channel is visible from the shore. This irregular fence of ice, of which I have spoken, suggests the Giant's Causeway, or the fantastic desolation of the Dakota Bad Lands. The frozen drift along the shore has, in rigorous seasons, considerable permanency. The sun is the mildest-mannered iconoclast (a lesson to those who believe in the sledge-hammer). He rarely takes by storm the enemy's stronghold. His method is gradually and almost imperceptibly to create angles, thus multiplying the points of attack; to girdle the shaft with strategic beams, so that when it falls, it seems to have toppled by reason of its own unbalanced gravity. I have sometimes imagined there is a sunny flaw in the ice itself, a surreptitious spark of inclosed caloric, which, no less than the outward ray, works towards dissolution. Can we discover any correlation existing between the icicle and

the iceberg? Only this: that the form of the icicle follows that of the stalactite, while the iceberg is a kind of immense movable stalagmite. I watch with interest the first tendency towards solidification in a stream of water. Notice how sluggishly the current drags along; how dark and mantling it looks, like some dense liquid slowly cooling off. Large bubbles collect on the surface. Next, fine crystal bayonets and spears are thrust out from the margin, as though they would impale and hold the unwilling current. Dipping reeds and willow whips are soon glazed over, and made the nuclei of small glacial reefs; the web spreads, and the stream is firmly woven under. Windows of ground glass are these shallow, translucent ice-pools scattered about the tufty pasture. Here are fantastic panes, irregularly shaped, no larger than my hand; and here (two pools divided by a narrow strip of turf) a long mullioned window, curiously engraved and pictured, somewhat obscure in design, when seen from the outside, but doubtless legible and distinct could we obtain an interior view. Ribs and bars of brittle white ice cross each other simulating lattice-work; the underside of these pictured

panes will be found covered with rough hoar-frost vegetation, which accounts for the appearance of ground glass. Imprisoned leaves, brown as mummy, are here embalmed in crystal, overlaid with leaves of glistening filigree. Freezing must have begun at the margins of these pools, which are most grotesque wherever the grass lent itself to the whimsey of the moment. The edges of the pool are corrugated, as though the water frowned at the advances of the cold, and even resisted the creeping torpor. In the smoother and clearer middle are two or three imperfectly elliptical lines, resembling the forms which the liquid in a spirit-level takes when coming to an equilibrium. Whether the water was entirely converted into ice or the ground absorbed it, there is frequently not a drop under the pretentious ice. I break into this crystal palace in search of the winter elves who built it, and find not a sprite at home; all airy, dry, and deserted. Such ice breaks with a musical resonance and slight local echo. Where there has been no considerable pool, but only a thimbleful of moisture here and there in the turf, beautiful freaks of congelation are revealed. I am reminded of the

thick webs hung with shimmering beads of dews, that covered this field on a June morning; now the webs are as spun glass and the big glittering beads which they mesh tremble to no wind. Along this slow thread of free water the dipping grass is strung with gypsy trinkets. A silver pendulum swung from a willow twig, and barely touching the water in its oscillations, keeps the time of day here. I can even hear the ticking of this time-piece, which, if the cold increases, will stop altogether. At sunset I do not fail to note the red lamp that burns in each of these translucent windows; I then imagine them to open into little shrines or oratories, to which the field-spirit retires for meditation and worship.

It is past the solstice, — close upon the crumbling verge of the year. At last, there falls a snow, the fibre of which has been well tested in yonder laboratory of the heavens. No "sugar-snow" this, to melt in our cup! It has come to stay. Its siege will not be so long as in New England, nor will its depth be so great or so uniform in this locality; but it suffices. The houses, muffled at foundation and eaves, look low as pictures of Swiss chalets, — so low that it

seems possible to rest one's elbow on the roof, and look about on the village beneath. The woods in the distance are mere hedge-rows, and there are no longer fences to divide claims. Imagination adds a good rod to the breadth of an untracked road in winter. The storm has isolated us, but not unkindly. There is no misanthropy in our retirement; on the contrary, we seem to have withdrawn ourselves for the sole purpose of considering how we may love our neighbor still better. We fancy him engaged in the same benevolent meditations. There is even an expression of good-will toward us in the affable curve of the smoke that comes from his chimney. At night our fireside and that mellow star, our evening lamp, can scarcely be contained within doors; at least, looking out at the window, we see their charitable image, constant and bright, under the rocking trees in the blue winter dusk. If we spoke of "the dead of the year," it was a mistake. The embers are well covered over.

FLAKE WHITE.

It has just fallen upon my tablets, and with it a voice saying, *Write*. But how to handle a subject so delicate! Surely the touch should be at once tender and cold. Even as I speak of Flake White, it is no longer called by that name, but has become vague moisture. I would dwell upon the stainless purity of the snow, but Fancy being so careless in her chemistry, the probabilities are that the chromatic unity which I seek will be decomposed; whence violet, amber, or even rose-tinted snow may result. Then, if my experiment be accused of failure, I will summon, to be my apologist, not the snow-flake, but the more ingenuous snow crystal, with the rainbow twinkle in its face.

Memorable are the verses beginning thus: —

> "Announced by all the trumpets of the sky
> Arrives the snow."

Yet the heraldry of a snow-storm is not always to the ear, with flourish of the sky

trumpets. To Jupiter Pluvius belong noisy pomp and circumstance, — the clattering chariot and the hurtling bolt; Jupiter Niveus more often walks the heavens shod with silence, gray of countenance, yet benign, softening the austere air with the gifts of his right hand. The first flakes of the year, — how doubtful, wavering, tentative, as though there were as yet no beaten path for them to follow in their journey from the clouds to earth, or as though they were unwilling to desert the goodly society of their kindred in the sky! The blades of tender autumnal grass look very cold, lifted through the scant coverlet spread by a first snow; one shivers seeing them, and wishes that their retirement might be hastened. The wanderings of the dead leaves are brought to an end by the snow, to which they impart a stain from the coloring matter not yet leached from their tissues. By this circumstance the age of the season might be gauged, approximately; at least, the snows of the later winter suffer no such discoloration from contact with the leaf-strewn ground.

When the snow is damp and clinging, as it not unfrequently is at the beginning and

end of the winter, a wonderful white spring-time comes upon the earth. Behold, the orchards bloom again almost in the similitude of May; the dry stalks in the garden undergo the miracle that befell the bishop's staff in the legend, and deck themselves with beauty. Last summer's nests are again tenanted, brooded by doves of peace descended from heaven. Every cobweb which the wind has spared, under the eaves or in the porch, displays a fluttering increment of snow. What a deal of wool-gathering there has been! The rough bark of the trees, the roofs and clap-boards of the houses, are hung with soft shreds and tatters; the "finger of heaven" has put on a white cot. If we walk abroad in this new creation, it shall seem that we have been suddenly let into some magnified frost picture; nor can we be quite sure that we ourselves are not of the same frail, ethereal texture as the exquisite work around us, and like it destined to glide into naught, under the arrows of the sun. When such damp snow freezes upon the branches, and afterwards falls in crusted fragments, the perforations made in the snow beneath resemble the tracks of many small, cushion-footed animals; one would like to

know what Æsopian council, or palaver, was held under the dooryard trees in the sly middle of the night.

There is great variety in the quality and fibre of the snow as it falls at different temperatures, in quiet, or ceaselessly worried by the wind. "Hail is the coldest corn," declares an ancient rune. However that may be, by the chaff that is driven in our faces we know that they are threshing up yonder this afternoon. At some other time it is not chaff, but heavenly grain (such as the horses of the Homeric deities may have munched), that is lavishly scattered abroad. To walk upon such snow is very like attempting to walk in a bin of wheat, and a dry, craunching sound attends each footstep. Sometimes it snows not flakes, but little fasces of crystalline fagots; sometimes, also, miniature snow-balls, well packed, ready made for the sport of the invisible sprites of the storm. Again, by the fineness and softness of the flake, it appears that the old traditional goose-wife, who lives in the clouds, is plucking only the down from under the wings of her flock; she is not so painstaking and fastidious at all times. Occasionally I am reminded that there is a lapidary in heaven, who takes the

rough gem of the snow, and by secret dexterity — cutting, polishing, and engraving — causes it to wear a thousand lovely forms and devices. Perhaps these are the

> "Beautiful things made new, for the surprise
> Of the sky children,"

which Saturn promised there should be on his regaining the empire of the skies. Or it may be that these crystal stars and wheels, in all curious and fantastic variations, are experiments in pyrotechnics — frozen fire-works, in which the rockets are made to take only descending curves. I sometimes please myself with imagining that when these exquisite fragments come to a common resting-place on earth, by some recondite law of attraction or correspondence they fit themselves together, point locking into angle and side matching side. Might not an ear divinely gifted detect a faint musical report when these morning-stars of the snow celebrate their union? "And they all sing, melting as they sing, of the mysteries of the number six, six, six."

> Six petals has the lily stainless white,
> And six the wandering blossom of the snow;
> If these their constant order could forego,
> Sun, moon, and stars would break their sacred plight.

The snow which falls in these obvious crystalline patterns is of the lightest and most diaphanous quality. A broken branch lies upon the ground, completely covered with this delicate counterpane, yet every twig and bud is still plainly defined. I have a fancy that I would like to see half-blown crimson roses inclosed, but not concealed, in such a cool white shrine. The season which most regard as forbiddingly ascetic, — has it not its touches of refinement and luxury? Sometimes, for several nights in succession, there will fall a light film of snow, not adding, practically, to that already upon the ground, yet sufficing to remove all stains and blemishes of the day. Thus Nature has care of her complexion in winter, so renewing it, from morning to morning, that it still presents an infantine softness and smoothness of texture. Be quick to take suggestion. You do not know but that this gentle snow which fell in the night — winter's dew — possesses the excellence attributed to the dew of May. With your hand skim off the cream of it, and bathe your face therewith, not forgetting her who melted pearls in her cup, — whose extravagance was naught in comparison with that which we practice, dissolving

the jewels of the sky for a lotion! The fable of a shower of gold was substantiated, on a bright and still day of last winter, when the air became filled with glittering motes of finest snow or frost, visible only in the sunshine. I am not sure that the display should have been called a shower, since the golden atoms, owing to their buoyancy, were kept floating in the air.

Where the flake falls, there it would fain rest in peace; but the wind will not have it so. Even in serene weather, whoever looks out on the open field is likely to see an occasional skirmish of gentle zephyrs puffing the dust of snow at each other in sport. Snow that has been fretted by the wind for some time at last has the appearance of a flaked and crannied bed of a stream in dry weather. Yonder lies the garden, marked with smooth, shallow furrows trending north and south. Well I know what share has been plowing there. These furrows are not permanent, but with every returning blast of the west wind are moved forward, as waves are driven towards the shore.

"Out of an unseen quarry, evermore
Furnished with tile, the fierce artificer
Carves his white bastions with projected roof

> Round every windward stake, or tree, or door;
> Speeding, the myriad-handed, his wild work
> So fanciful, so savage; naught cares he
> For number or proportion."

But for me it is the West, and not the North Wind that so astonishes Art with the result of his night-work. In every drifting storm from the west a huge recumbent figure occupies the porch in front of my door. I think that this quiet giant has on helmet, habergeon, and greaves, and that at an instant's warning he would be ready for assault or defense. Is it strange that I wish to know by what name he goes in his own native Niflheim, and why my portal enjoys such guardianship? Also, as I look out of the window and observe the great North American sloth, white and lazy, stretched at full length upon the rocking bough of the evergreens, I question how long it will continue pasturing there. It will be, perhaps, several days before the shaggy creature loosens its hold and falls to the ground: sun, and not wind, is its chief natural enemy.

A great snow-fall inspires a novel feeling of adventure and hardihood. Our familiar fields, with their pretty bounds, have disappeared, and in their place lies a spacious

wilderness, of which, if we please, we may be the first pioneers. How suggestive is the solitary track in a wide snow! What quest was this? What Crusoe has gone about his forlorn insular affairs? Yet, should we too go upon the quest, taken in lead by these venturous solitary tracks, they become almost companionable, communicating goodwill and courage. "Follow, follow, thou shalt win." A long siege of snow and a voyage at sea have something in common. Steadily lift around us the surges of this fruitless, lifeless white sea. Farewell the good brown earth. It may be that we shall not behold it again for the space of time which we would consume if sailing around Cape Horn. Something like the joy of the returned sea-voyager is ours, when, at the breaking-up of winter, we *land*, and feel the kindly soil once more under our feet.

I am disposed to credit the rumor I have heard that Night and Winter exchanged vows at the beginning of time. I perceive what close bosom friends they are, and doubt that they will admit a third into their communion; nevertheless, their comity encourages my overtures. No winter day, as it seems to me, was ever so fair as the winter

night with the moon presiding. Not for the eye of the sun are the finer, subtler wonders of the snow; these are reserved for the celestial wanderer "with white fire laden." So well pleased is she with the faithful coldness and purity of the snow that she is constantly visiting it with favors. Therefore are her nameless gem-bearing mountains and her treasure-houses laid under contribution for the adornment of her terrestrial love, in the folds of whose garments a myriad jewels sparkle. These, one may guess, are the only genuine moonstones. On a summer night the occasional flickering of the dew is explicable by the coming and going of the light breeze over the grass, or by the stir of insects among the blades; but the continual and ubiquitous sparkle of the frost-glazed snow, where there is neither life nor motion, carries an elfin fascination. Sometimes I liken these keen, restless scintillations to the sparks of electricity excited in the furry coat of some animal: soft and warm, indeed, to the sleeping earth is this ample pelage — as of a mammoth polar bear — spread comfortably over hill and valley. As I walk under the trees I notice that their shadows, printed smoothly on the moonlit snow, produce the effect of a

dark blue veining in marble. If I knew how to command their services, a troop of genii should even now be at work, cutting and dressing blocks of this veined marble, to build me a palace that should rival Aladdin's.

Carving the face of a snow image to please some young friends of mine, I became fascinated with the work. The charm of simulating the most permanent of all materials with the most fleeting was impressed upon me. An artist might mould what he pleased of snow, and never fear that the creature of his hands would demand of him a soul at the judgment day! It also seemed to me that one might acquire such skill in this line of art as that some munificent citizens would be glad to employ him to fill their yards with beautiful sculpture, though it were but the pride of one moonlight night or the wonder of a single morning.

On a stormy evening, when the air is thick with flying snow, I have received charming suggestion from the village lights. Walls, roofs, bounding lines generally, are lost in the snowy obscurity; but the hospitable windows remain, curtained, mellow-tinted panes, or curtainless pictures of fireside comfort,

framed, apparently, by mist and cloud. At a little distance it were easy to imagine that these windows belonged to the ground-floor of heaven, rather than to any houses made with hands.

Though the trumpets of the sky may have been blown in its van, the snow, when it arrives on earth, abhors and annihilates all loud noise. How muffled and remote are the sounds in a village during a great snowfall! — all mutes and subvocals. Stamping of feet in the porch across the way is reported distantly sonorous, as though the noise had been made in a subterranean chamber. Across the high, smooth fields comes the faint pealing of a bell, mysteriously sweet. The bell hangs in the church of a neighboring village; I have often heard it before, but not with the same impression as now. So might have sounded the chimes in the buried church of the legend, on a Christmas morning.

The snow has a mediatorial character. Wherever this earth approaches nearest to heaven, on all loftiest summits of the globe, there stands the white altar, perpetually: nor is the religion to which the altar is reared one of pure abstraction, colorless mysticism.

Sunrise, sunset, and the winds, with the snow, bring out on the tops of our Western mountains (if current descriptions do not exaggerate) such surprises of form and color, whirling column and waving banner, as were never dreamed of in the pageants beheld by the initiate of the Eleusinian Mysteries.

FROST AND MOONSHINE.

One night in winter I gradually became aware that conversation was being carried on in my room. I listened with no such uneasiness as is usually inspired by a nocturnal disturbance; on the contrary, the fine, clear, musical tones proceeding from near the window were particularly pleasing to my ear and fancy. I could not see the speakers (two in number), but supposed them to be concealed by the curtain that hung before the window. As I afterwards fell asleep, my recollection of what I heard is not very complete, but the dialogue, as I remember it, was in the following vein: —

"Come, come, old friend and fellow, you have been in Arcadia; I have not, you know. Now tell me, does my picture appeal to you? Are these trees, sedges, and flowers like those you have seen in that blessed country? But wait a moment. I will just poise a butterfly on the foremost blossom of my nymph's wild-rose crown, and I will put a

wreath of pomegranate flowers around the neck of the lamb which the shepherd is presenting her. There! all these light touches help to tell the story. But you are silent."

"My dear Jack, what shall I say? The form of beauty is indeed here, the drawing is faultless, and many a sweet thought worthy of your elfin genius appears in the details; but" —

"But what?"

"Color, warmth, life, — these are not here!"

"Alas, I know they are not: but remember my scant opportunities. I was never in Arcadia."

"But you *are* in Thule: is there nothing here to paint?"

"There might be for another; for me there is not. I paint from my dreams, and my dreams are all of the summer and the South. I am forbidden those happy regions, kept here in rigorous exile; so I set my imagination to work to compensate me for the deprivation I am doomed to suffer. You, who can range where you will, should not deny me the pleasures of imagination."

"A pine-tree loved a palm" —

"Ah, how well I know that pine-tree and

that palm! I know all those who sing the songs of this human world, now sleeping. They and I are close kin, though they may not choose to recognize the tie. I feel for them, but they do not think of me."

"You speak of the poets. In what respect do you find they resemble you?"

"In this: they, too, have dreamed of Paradise, and all their care is to reproduce their lovely visions; they, too, bring their themes from far, spurning the near-at-hand and the familiar. Whatever they lack and most desire, that they strive to supply by methods not unlike my own. I have not seen the summer streams, the flowers, and the grass, the winged creatures that live and rejoice in the sunshine; but out of my longing to visit the world which they adorn, out of my fancy, and with the aid of the hearsay that is always abroad in the air, I have produced these pale and transient semblances. Do you think I am satisfied with what I have done? Neither are those other artificers satisfied with their work."

"I wonder you do not address a sympathetic message to them."

"I have already done so; and if you will bring your taper a little nearer you may

read for yourself. The writing is interwoven with the grass blades at the feet of the nymph.

> Thou mortal, who mayst scan this picture sheen,
> Scorn not the artist, though thou blame his art:
> His touch is cold, but white fire warms his heart;
> Thou, too —

"Hush! I think we are overheard."

The voices ceasing, I soon fell asleep. In the morning, drawing back the curtain with purpose to read the interrupted verse, to my great disappointment I found the window-panes were like plain ground-glass; not a trace of nymph and shepherd, not a hint of glyphic writing. Shrewd pair, — Frost and Moonshine!

HEARTH-FIRE.

Is not the prejudice in favor of summer greatly diminished at the coming of weather sufficiently cold to recommend the kindling of fires in grate and stove? With what cheerful readiness we obey the Horatian injunction, —

> "Dissolve frigus, ligna super foco,
> Large reponens."

Only natives of the temperate or the frozen zone can estimate the virtues residing in this element. To southern races warmed by the vertical sun, the significance of fire must be chiefly mechanical; it is Mulciber's bound apprentice, a blind annealer of metals, working without boon or hire. A northern people, on the contrary, bring it home, cherish it upon the hearth, and learn to love it for its sociability. A Scandinavian Prometheus (had there been such a deity) would have employed at once his stolen fire in establishing greater comfort in the domiciles of mortals, in teaching them how to convert the

slain wild boar into delicious crackling, how broil their venison, and how to bake the pre-historic journey-cake. Wherever fire goes, there go both the symbol and practical embodiment of civilization. A trapper or a miner in the western wilderness leaves behind him in the smouldered remains of his camp-fire the site of a temporary holding and domesticity. While he warmed, ate, and slept by the fire, he lived there, though only over night. That spot of earth became hearth, by his act. The savage solitude was aware of an innovation, the wild beasts kept aloof; for the fire, defensive and humane, surrounded the sleeper as with a magic environment. Methinks the repeated kindling of a fire upon the same ground, for domestic uses, even though a roof-tree were a long time lacking, ought to be admitted as a valid way of proving claim. The Grecian colonists, carrying with them into their new home some of the fire from the altar of their native city, doubtless, in this custom, felt a stronger bond with those whom they left behind them.

As time goes on, the human race more and more puts out of its communion the social spirit Fire, now from the fire-place confin-

ing it in a stove, now from the stove chasing it to the cellar. A house warmed by furnace-heat, be the hospitality never so liberal, lacks one most cordial appointment not wanting to many a humble domicile. How we miss in the furnace-heated house that bright converging of all the household benevolences, the true *focus* of domestic life, the fireside. When one sees, as occasionally one may see, the device of imitative coals, or wood, with an uncommunicated flame behind them, it is suggested that there is yet a lurking wistfulness in the human kind towards the once familiar friend and servitor. Surely we have come a long way since the reign of King Log in the ample fire-place, when the children of the house roasted chestnuts and apples on the hearth, when the knitting needles clicked and gleamed from the place of age and honor by the fire, while the wintering cricket sent up a superannuated yet cheery note from his cranny on the brick hearth, or the floor of the oven — the oven, whence, in their due season, ripe issued the brown loaf and the white.

The malicious demon of the South Sea islander's superstition, spitting flame out of the wood, is in our more intimate experi-

ence a very powerful genius, whom we are able to invoke to a friendly alliance by means of friction and a little phosphorus at the point of a pine sliver. Only those who possess the knack of "building" a fire are to be reckoned among the genuine fire-worshipers; to those only the genius deigns to exhibit his cunningest sorceries. When the trains of kindlings have all been laid, the proper nooks and crannies planned to secure draught and invite ambuscade, and when the match has been applied, and the nimble flames rush out to reconnoitre, the successful fire-builder may well look upon himself as a professor, not of the black, but the bright art. I speak of a wood-fire. On reflection, I am tempted to say that there are none but wood fires. I burn the tree which was felled, chopped, and corded up in the timber-lot last autumn, — heart of beech or maple, fifty or a hundred years old, by the registration of its rings. But my neighbor burns the bodies of trees of an immemorial growth, prostrated by ancient storms, and laid by to season in the depths of the earth; and with these trees he burns the leaves, flowers, and turf of primeval summers. The fuel thus stored up almost since

the settling of chaos, may well be imagined to contain the true Promethean heat, may well be said to have been hidden away from the consuming influence of the atmosphere by some kindly divinity with forethought of the present and coming time. The coal miners may be reckoned as woodmen, and the mine itself as a vast Hercynian or Black Forest, stretching millions of acres under our feet. When the superficial forests have been quite stripped away by the careless generations, men will draw yet more extensively upon this unsunned and unsurveyed timber reservation. When this is finally exhausted, the glacial period will have recurred, most probably, when all heating agencies will be wholly at a discount. Meanwhile, Science bids some forward pupil of hers to sing the Odyssey of a coal-fire — to praise the coal as the black first-cousin of the diamond! And who shall say that in burning it does not give out as fine a brilliance, as cheerful play of colors, as does its inestimable relative? You must, at least, account coal as the casket of *flame*, which last deserves to be reckoned among the true gems.

I have just laid on the coals a billet of

well-seasoned wood — a Meleager's brand, perhaps, for it burns as though a hot young life were in it, and the very heart had taken fire already. Yet I reflect that, whether the tree comes to consumption upon the hearth, or, living out its full time, falls and lies along the ground, to the condition of fuel it must at last arrive. A slow fire is no less a sure fire; so the log of old chestnut, sienna-colored, and of the quality of sawdust, burning or smouldering away in the woods for long years, may now be said to be reduced to ashes. But who was warmed by this fire? How shall we measure the volume of the lost caloric, or guess at the end it served in the eternal utility of creation? The fueling of a universe makes no reckoning of petty waste. The earth is well on fire, the sun, perhaps, is burning past his prime, while the moon is already a cinder. A long time ago this conflagration began; who knows how many planets have been devoured?

Rumor occasionally brings word that the prairies of the west, or the pine woods of the north, are wasting under the ravages of wildfire. Now I have sometimes imagined there is no wilder wildfire than the one which has

yielded me its delectable savage society all the nights of the winter. It has its sudden advances, retreats, and momentary truces, of which I do not understand the scheme or provocation, though I suspect that the tactics displayed in a great conflagration are at all essential points followed out by this housed and fettered hearth blaze. It requires little stretch of the imagination to attribute live and visible personality to a destructive fire. Watch it at its work of unbuilding an edifice to which it has laid siege, the dislodging and swaying of beams, the curtains of flame shaken out at the windows; the savagery and rudeness here; the delicacy and devicefulness there; the tumbling down of walls, the breaking through of flooring; then the following, with artful coquetting delays, some inviting train of combustible stuff, or, when the fire has been driven off from some quarter of a building, the sudden springing up of a little flower-garden of white and red flame in a niche of the blackened wall. Consider, too, the clamor of the great devastator, the roaring, hissing, whispering, sighing, heard from out the conflagration. My hearth-fire, likewise, is not without a certain degree of vocality, semi-articulate speech.

It has its soft and its rough breathings, its undertones, and its notes of triumph, as it drives a lambent wedge between the bark and body of the wood, or makes a spiral escalade up through some knot-hole. Now it gives out a fine staccato click, not unlike the snapping of frost on the panes; or now it utters itself in a still small voice, a tone above the highest pitch of the violin — the next degree to the shrill no-tone where the ideal gamut begins. This I do not hear except when the woody fibre is entirely disintegrated, and the fire considerably spent. It is some released Ariel singing its way to the free air; and I may have seen the sprite vanishing up a seven-tinted ladder of flame. Is it not a little strange that while the unsubstantial inhabitants of the air, earth, and waters have been classified (sylphs, gnomes, nymphs, and undines), fire should remain an unpeopled element — fancy not having the hardihood to penetrate its fervid labyrinths? The only creature said to reside therein is the crooked and malicious salamander, an undesirable visitor to have pop out upon one's hearth on a wild winter night when the witches' brooms are brushing the black air. I have never had the ill luck to

see this monster, nor, indeed, aught more ominous than a lively representation of the phœnix, pluming for his long flight to Heliopolis.

When the wood has burned down to an ember, I delight to stir the brands so that the structure of the glowing mass is laid open to the very core or heart. Here are lightnings playing back and forth among the coals, like the heat lightnings of summer-evening skies. This darting glow is the fire's arterial circulation, fed by that element in the air most grateful to its eager necessity; or, these keen fugitive jets of white and yellow flame may be understood as the repartee, equivocations, and conceits of the fire, — its pyrotechnic "small talk." It is all things to all men. To the philosopher it will be a philosopher, to the poet or any other artificer it will be full of images and inventions to match those in his brain. To the weather-wise it is as good as a vane and barometer, the volatility of the flame and the volume of the draught indicating the direction of the wind and the weight of the atmosphere. For myself, I think it no wonder if, conversing night after night with this eloquent advocate on the hearth, my thought

sometimes catches fire, — gets a taste of caustic. Hail, mighty magician, patient bond-slave, acute companion, live kaleidoscope of wonderful colors and forms, indestructible archives of martyrology, bible of the Parsee mysteries, illuminated missal of all ancient faith and fable! Teach me of thy body, soul, and spirit, — thy seen flame, thy felt fervor, thine invisible light breathing!

To the evening hearth one may bring all the briery gatherings of the day's cares, and dispose of them utterly, may bury chagrin past blushing, and burn all enmity in effigy. The secretive virtue of the fire! You may lodge your treasure or trouble with the earth; in a convulsive fit she may sometime lay it bare. The sea is not always a safe custodian — witness how a fish was sent ashore with the king's ring, cast as a votive offering to the gods forever! But any fire is deeper than the sea. Feed it with the merchandise and opulence of the whole world, yet can you never feed up to the surface. You cannot dredge or fathom it, you cannot dive in any manner of machine to bring up what, by chance or design, has been thrown into this Red Sea. 'T is the best preservative from moth and rust that make such havoc

among the sacred things in our reliquaries; 't is the only strict preventive known against the curious or the careless hands of strangers in the after-time. Undoubtedly, the best "fire-proof safe" is the fire itself. Besides, the more we consign to this royal conservator the greater the credit and confidence it yields us. What does Vesta write to me? A glowing *résumé* of those sparkling letters from my friend, which I resolutely sacrificed but a moment since. The paper on which they were traced has fallen into ashes, but the subject-matter reappears in a magnificent red-line and red-letter edition. Sometimes, as I watch the burning of such offerings, I read a ghostly leaf, charred or wholly consumed, yet, for an instant, buoyed up by the breath of the fire, while my glance runs over the unviolated charactery. One might collect the ashes of any precious writing thus reduced to compendious form, and preserve them with reference to a future restoration, if one might credit the plan of palingenesis which Sir Kenelm Digby lays down in his "Treatise on the Vegetation of Plants:"—

"Quercetanus, the famous physician of King Henry the Fourth, tells us a wonderful story of a Polonian doctor, that showed him a dozen

glasses hermetically sealed, in each of which was a different plant; for example, a rose in one, a tulip in another, a clove gillyflower in a third, and so of the rest. When he offered these glasses to your first view, you saw nothing in them but a heap of ashes in the bottom. As soon as he held some gentle heat under any of them, presently there arose out of the ashes the idea of a flower and the stalk belonging to those ashes, and it would shoot up and spread abroad to the due height and just dimensions of such a flower, and had perfect colors, shape, magnitude, and all other accidents, as if it really were that very flower. But whenever you drew the heat from it, would this flower sink down by little and little, till at length it would bury itself in its bed of ashes. And thus it would do as often as you exposed it to moderate heat, or withdrew it from it. I confess it would be no small delight to me to see this experiment, with all the circumstances that Quercetan sets down. Athanasius Kircharus, at Rome, assured me that he had done it; and gave me the process of it. But no industry of mine could effect it."

It is aways so; the little phial of ashes of roses, notwithstanding all our "industry," refuses to yield to the charm.

A portion of earth, wrapping up a jet of fire, typifies mortality as well as might any

other figure. When this uneasy and revolutionary inmate has spread and burned up its lodge, life has expired, we say. But before this event, innumerable accidents may arrest its free current, and distort the symmetry of its flame; too often, indeed, we are made sensible of the cloddish masonry of the hearth. At its brightest and best our fire is communicative and social, throwing off such scintillations as benevolence, friendship, gratitude, enthusiasm, and generous rivalry. There is a fine passage in Homer touching the preservation of the vital flame. Ulysses, just escaped from the anger of the sea, naked, and lacerated with beating against the rocks, has only strength enough to crawl to the friendly shelter of an olive grove. "Dead-weary was he." There he covers himself with dry leaves, and cherishes with sleep his spent powers, — just as some countryman living far from neighbors carefully buries his fire at night, that he may revive it when needed.

If the hunter or explorer, encamped in some "lion-haunted inland," owes to fire his preservation from wild beasts, the solitary by his own hearth has the same charmed defense against the jungle inhabitants of his

thought. The ethical symbolism of fire is ordeal and purification. What flame burns, and yet burns not to the refining of that which was committed to it for trial? There should be hope for those flame-enveloped spirits in the Inferno, that their dross shall at length be purged away, something fire-proof and indestructible remaining behind. When I remember that the soul is an authentic spark of Promethean heat, I am far on the way of dropping the doctrine of hell-fire, and adopting that of heaven-fire!

The coals have lost the incandescent lights that lately played through them, and now resemble a heap of stones on which lichens are beginning to grow. I note a curious thing; here is the gray tissue that held a portion of fire no longer to be seen. This delicate cast-off fabric is just the bulk and shape of the coal once contained within it, but is lighter than the frailest breath, — an abandoned chrysalis-case. The fire has gone out. Come, tell me where it has gone, and on what errand. I have heard that it reports in the Empyrean, source and home of the wide-wandering element. There is some countenance for the theory. Study the flame of a candle, of a furnace, or of a conflagra-

tion; in each case its general tendency is toward the zenith; it is always struggling to free itself from the substance on which it feeds, twisting, writhing, recoiling, like a Laocoön group endowed with color and motion! Finally, when it has gnawed off its gyves, up and away it goes with a valediction of scattered sparks. It is the "flight of the unknown to the unknown." What more fit, seeing this carrier spirit never loiters on its errand, than that our well-beloved dead should be committed to its light and tireless wing? Spirit to spirit, and ashes to ashes. Poetry and utility join hands over the rite of incineration.

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